



General  Council

Consultation on
**Proposed amendments to
the competencies**
for optometrists and dispensing opticians

About the General Optical Council

Introduction

The General Optical Council (GOC) is one of 13 organisations in the UK known as health and social care regulators. These organisations oversee the health and social care professions by regulating individual professionals. We are the regulator for the optical professions in the UK. The Council currently registers around 22,000 optometrists, dispensing opticians, student opticians and optical businesses.

Mission and values

The GOC's mission is to protect the public by promoting high standards of education, conduct and performance amongst opticians. Our work is built on a foundation of six core values. These values are based on the Better Regulation Commission's criteria for good regulation.

Proportionate:

We will identify and target the issues of greatest risk to public safety.
We will remove unnecessary bureaucracy.

Accountable:

We will seek, and respond to, the views of stakeholders and partners.
We will consider and review the consequences of our actions.

Consistent:

We will work in collaboration with UK health regulatory bodies and other partners to develop consistent policies and procedures.

Transparent:

We will explain and publicise decisions, and make public, wherever possible, Council information, activities and proceedings.

Targeted:

We will ensure that our activity is focused on the areas of greatest risk, or where there is most benefit to public health and safety.

Organisational Excellence:

We will provide good value for money.
We will pursue high standards of customer service.
We will ensure that the Council is a good place to work, particularly through developing and training our staff and members.
We will promote and develop equality and diversity in all our work.

Contact details

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GOC Competencies Consultation

Start date: 8 December 2008

End Date: 15 January 2009

Contact: Grahame Tinsley. 020 7307 3477, gtinsley@optical.org

Consultation summary

1. The General Optical Council (GOC) is consulting on proposals to amend the competencies which must be demonstrated in order to be granted a qualification as an optometrist, a dispensing optician, or obtain specialty registration as a dispensing optician in contact lens practice. This consultation document outlines the background to the proposals, the rationale for the proposed changes, and asks you some questions in relation to the proposals. Whilst the questions highlight the areas where we would particularly appreciate your feedback, comment is invited on all aspects of the proposals.
2. The consultation closes on 15th January 2009. We will consider all responses, and what changes we wish to make in the light of these.
3. The GOC is particularly grateful to the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO) and the College of Optometrists (the College) for its work in formulating the proposals contained in this document. The GOC will share your responses with ABDO and the College, and seek their views on any changes to be made in the light of these.

Background

4. Under the Opticians Act 1989, the GOC is required to establish the competencies which a person must be able to demonstrate in order to be granted a qualification as an optometrist or a dispensing optician (section 12(1)(a)). In addition to the core competencies for qualification as an optometrist and a dispensing optician, the GOC has developed specialist competencies for dispensing opticians in contact lens practice and for optometrists in therapeutic prescribing. These different sets of competencies have been developed at different times, and there are clear structural and terminological differences between them. The current core competencies can be found on the GOC's website at the following links:

http://www.optical.org/en/our_work/Standards/Standards_in_competence.cfm

5. In June 2007, the GOC consulted on proposals to unify the framework within which its competencies are stated. This was to ensure a common structure and terminology between core competencies for qualification as an optometrist, dispensing optician, and the specialty competencies for dispensing opticians in contact lens practice. This original consultation document can be found on the GOC's website at the following link:

http://www.optical.org/goc/filemanager/root/site_assets/publications/consultations/CompetenciesConsultationFinal.doc

6. The consultation on the framework closed in November 2007. The responses were considered by the Competencies Working Group which had been established by the GOC's Standards Committee to oversee the review of the competencies.

7. Following the consultation, it was decided that the GOC should adopt the framework proposed in the consultation document. This was based on that used by the Optometrists Association Australia and included the following structural characteristics:

- Units - these are major components of activity;
- Elements - these are subdivisions of units which state the lowest logical, identifiable and discrete sub-groupings of actions, knowledge and clinical skills, which contribute to and build a unit;
- Performance Criteria - these specify the level of performance required in relation to an element; and
- Indicators - these are measurable and observable features for each performance criterion and assist in determining whether a competency is achieved.

8. It was also decided that a common nomenclature would be used in competency statements, and that key terms such as 'understanding' and 'ability' would have clear definitions.

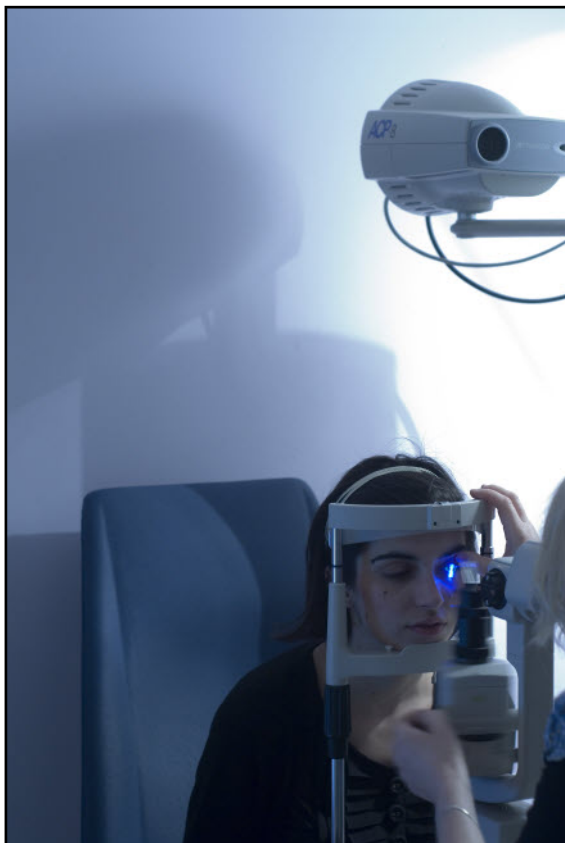
9. In recognition of the expertise and experience of the College of Optometrists (the College) and the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO) in assessing those who wish to qualify as optometrists and dispensing opticians respectively, the GOC invited both bodies to revisit the current GOC core competencies and asked them to make proposals as to how these competencies should be developed to be set within the revised framework. It was agreed that ABDO and the College would work under the following terms of reference:

- That the competencies should be set within the framework comprising units, elements, performance criteria and indicators;



- That the optometry competencies should take into account and build upon the recently revised Stage 1 competencies;
- That there would be collaboration between ABDO and the College in the development of the competencies, and that the competencies would be terminologically the same wherever possible;
- That the competencies at unit and element level would be statements about what optometrists and dispensing opticians should understand and be able to do, and hence the competency statements at these levels should be confined to using the terms 'understand' and 'ability' which the GOC would define;
- That the competencies should be developed so as to be a useable tool for the various uses to which they play a role in the exercise of GOC's functions, including their use for the assessment of overseas applicants, the approval of CET events and, for the future, revalidation.

10. ABDO and the College presented their proposals to the GOC's Competencies Working Group in November 2008. It was agreed that these proposals would be consulted on before being presented to the GOC's Standards Committee in January 2009. Final approval of the revised competencies would be sought by Council in March 2009. Any adjustments that need to be made to the assessment mechanisms of the assessing bodies and training establishments as a result of the proposed changes would not be introduced until the 2010-11 academic session.



The proposals and consultation questions

Proposals for revised competencies

11. The GOC has proposed the following definitions for use in the framework:
 - ‘The ability to’ means ‘having the skills and knowledge to perform to a required standard’;
 - ‘Understands’ means ‘having knowledge of the relevant concepts and procedures without the ability to perform them’.
12. ABDO has revisited the core competencies for qualification as a dispensing optician and the core competencies required for dispensing opticians to obtain specialty registration in contact lens practice – see **Annex 1 and 2**. The approach, in setting the competencies within the new framework, has not been to make radical adjustments to the competencies themselves. All adjustments have been made to add clarity as to what is required, and to aid consistency in terminology between the competencies for dispensing opticians and optometrists where there are areas of commonality.
13. The College has similarly revisited the core competencies for qualification as an optometrist – see **Annex 3** – and adopted the same approach. The College and ABDO worked together to ensure there was a consistency of approach in the ways in which they developed the competencies under the revised framework.
14. Before these proposals are considered through the GOC’s formal approval mechanisms, the GOC would like to know your views. In particular we would like to know:

Questions

1. Do you agree with the definitions of ‘the ability to’ and ‘understands’ (see paragraph 11)?
2. Do you agree that the competencies as set within the new framework add clarity to what is required to obtain a qualification as:
 - (i) an optometrist;
 - (ii) a dispensing optician; and
 - (iii) a dispensing optician with contact lens practice specialty (contact lens optician)?
3. Do you agree that the competencies as set within the new framework aid comparison of competency achievements for those qualifying as optometrists or dispensing opticians or contact lens opticians, and thus provide a framework within which competency requirements for career movement and progression between the professions can be benchmarked?
4. Do you agree that the competencies as set within the new framework will be a useable tool for the various uses to which they play a role in the exercise of GOC’s functions, including their use for the assessment of overseas applicants, the approval of CET events and, for the future, revalidation?

Responding to the Consultation

Respond to

Please send your responses to **Grahame Tinsley**, Assistant Director of Standards, no later than **15 January 2009**.

Post: 41 Harley Street, London, W1G 8DJ

Email: gtinsley@optical.org

Alternatively, you can respond by completing the online survey at **www.optical.org**

You may wish to include contact details for follow-up and special requests regarding publishing and sharing your response. Unless you state otherwise (and an automatic disclaimer generated by your IT system will not be taken as such), we will assume you are happy for us to publish your response and to share it with other GOC staff and council members.

Further information

Where possible, please provide evidence to support your response. If you are a representative group, it would be helpful if you could include a summary of the people and organisations that you represent.

You are under no obligation to respond to every question in the consultation, although we would appreciate input to as many areas as possible. If you only respond to some questions then your answers will still be given equal weight.

A copy of this consultation has been sent to a large number of stakeholder groups representing our registrants, the public, patients, students and other organisations.

If you have any queries about the consultation then please contact **Grahame Tinsley** using the contact details above.

The GOC's commitment to consultation

The General Optical Council believes it is important that the people affected by our work have a say in how we operate. We believe it is vital that we consult with all the groups with an interest in the GOC; patients, the public, our registrants, optical organisations, healthcare organisations, employers, other regulators, staff and other stakeholders.

Effective consultation is valuable to help us to improve the way we work. It informs us and helps us to achieve our mission of protecting the public through promoting good eyecare.

We are currently developing a formalised consultation framework. Feedback on the consultation process itself would be welcome. If you have any comments then please contact **Simon Grier** on sgrier@optical.org

