



General Optical Council Equality and Diversity Scheme 2010 – 2012

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1. Introduction

The GOC is committed to promoting and developing equality and diversity in all our work. We want to be sure that our policies, procedures and ways of working are fair to all individuals and groups, regardless of their ethnic origin, race, gender, gender identity, religion or religious belief, disability, sexual orientation or age.

2. About the GOC

The GOC is the regulator for the optical professions in the UK. Our purpose is to protect, promote and maintain the health and safety of the public by promoting high standards of education and conduct amongst opticians. The Council currently registers around 22,500 optometrists, dispensing opticians, student opticians and optical businesses.

We have four core functions:

- Setting standards for optical education and training, performance and conduct.
- Approving qualifications leading to registration.
- Maintaining a register of individuals who are qualified and fit to practise, train or carry on business as optometrists and dispensing opticians.
- Investigating and acting where a registrant's fitness to practise, train, or carry on business is impaired.

The Council's work is built on a foundation of six main values.

- *Proportionate*: targeting the issues of greatest risk to public safety;
- *Accountable*: involving stakeholders and partners;
- *Consistent*: working with others to make sure our work is fair;
- *Transparent*: explaining our decisions wherever possible;
- *Targeted*: focusing our efforts where there is most public benefit; and
- *Well organised*: providing value for money, high standards of customer service and promoting equality and diversity in all our work.

3. Purpose and scope

This Equality and Diversity Scheme fulfils our obligations under relevant equality legislation, covering statutory duties in relation to Race, Disability and Gender. It will also include The Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order 1998. Actions which relate to our statutory duties are identified within the Action plan (by bullet points in the relevant column). The new Equality Duty, which will be imposed by the Equality Bill, extending the duty of reporting against the existing three public sector duties (Race,

Disability and Gender) to include the four additional strands (Age, Religion or belief, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation) comes into effect from 2011.

What is the purpose of the Equality Bill

To ensure everyone has a fair chance in life. This is important to individuals, for a strong society and a competitive economy. The Equality Bill will promote equality, fight discrimination in all its forms, including age discrimination, and introduce transparency in the workplace which is key to tackling the gender pay gap.

The Bill will promote fairness and equality of opportunity; tackle disadvantage and discrimination; and modernise and strengthen our law to make it fit for the challenges that our society faces today and in the future.

The most recent legislation, which builds on statutes such as the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Race Relations Act 1976, is:

- Equality Act 2006
- Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (DDA)
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- Employment Equality (Sex Discrimination) Regulations 2005
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended) (RRA)
- Equal Pay act 1970 (as amended)

The Gender Directive 2004/113/EC was transposed into UK law in December 2007, and implemented the principle of equal treatment between men and women (including trans people) in the access to and supply of goods and services, including health and eye care services.

Where specific duties are imposed by legislation, these are an identifiable part of our Equality and Diversity Scheme. See Annex 2 for more detail on legislation.

4. Strategic objectives

The GOC considers that all of our public functions are relevant to our equality duties. In particular, we believe that the GOC has a critical role to play in ensuring that the following are free from discrimination:

- access to optometry and dispensing optics training in the UK
- registration as an optometrist or dispensing optician in the UK
- access to our registers, public meetings and information
- our complaints and Fitness to Practise processes

- employment with or appointment to the GOC, its Council and committees.

5. Responsibilities

Overall accountability for the Equality and Diversity Scheme lies with the Council of the GOC. The Executives are responsible for ensuring that equality and diversity issues are taken into account in their work. A dedicated member of staff will ensure governance of this area.

The Chief Executive, Directors and senior managers are responsible for implementing the agreed equality and diversity policies. They are responsible for the development and delivery of the Action Plan.

All staff, Council members, advisers, visitors, and hearings panel members are expected to promote fairness and equality and value diversity.

6. Action planning

The Executive assesses the impact of equality and diversity implications on their department's work, and identify priorities and objectives for action. The Action Plan is a standing agenda item at the Council meetings. The most recent action plan was satisfactorily concluded in December 2009 and a new action plan will be prepared for review by Council from April 2010 following the consideration and approval of this updated Scheme by Council at its meeting in February 2010. The action plan will be continuously reviewed and updates given to Council so that they are confident that equality and diversity is always at the forefront of the GOC's work.

7. Monitoring, Audit and Impact Assessment

The GOC has introduced an equality and diversity monitoring form for all new registrants. This will monitor Age, Gender, Ethnic Origin and Disability. We intend to use this data to identify any potential barriers or discrimination within our work. We have also introduced the same form for fitness to practise (FTP) complainants to identify any trends or patterns in this area. This information is strictly confidential and no names or addresses are assigned to the forms. These forms are analysed by a third party and the forms are then destroyed.

The Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment form has been implemented. The form is completed when there are any new policies or changes to existing policies. These policies are assessed to ensure that they do not have an adverse impact on the Human Rights Act.

8. The First Scheme – What has the GOC achieved?

The GOC achieved its objectives for the first scheme by establishing the governance structure to oversee the equality and diversity scheme. The other areas of achievement are listed below:

- Implemented the equality impact assessment form
- Provided equality and diversity training for Council, Committees, FTP Panel's and all staff
- Implemented a monitoring form for both registrants and FTP complainants.
- Implemented the Welsh Language Scheme, which includes publication of GOC leaflets, a complaints procedure and the GOC website is now accessible to Welsh speakers;
- Developed a reporting mechanism to Council at every meeting to provide updates on the action plan;
- Updated the GOC's leaflets using the 'Plain English' campaign so that the information is clear and where possible available in other languages;
- Reporting in the annual report on the equality and diversity scheme and progress of the action plan.

9. The 2010 – 2012 Scheme – The GOC's next steps

The GOC's has made significant progress with the implementation of the equality and diversity scheme. The next phase is to further develop the action plan and ensure that equality and diversity is embedded within the organisation as a whole.

Listed below are the areas of work for consideration over the next two years:

- Creating an equality and diversity working group to oversee the operation of our scheme and give guidance.
- Implementing a regular external audit to monitor our equality and diversity performance.
- Incorporate the additional four strands (Age, Religion or belief, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation) into the equality and diversity action plan.
- Improve our collection and use of equality data to include both quantitative and qualitative information e.g. monitoring statistics and questionnaires.

- Continue to engage with registrants, stakeholders and the public on our equality and diversity work.
- Regularly review the equality and diversity training offered to Council, Committees and staff to ensure that it is up-to-date.
- Continue to create policies which have equality and diversity embedded within them.
- Further specific training to the GOC member of staff identified to have responsibility for managing our Equality and Diversity Scheme

Legislation

Race equality

The Race Relations Act (RRA) general duty requires that we have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful racial discrimination;
- promote equality of opportunity between persons of different racial groups, and;
- promote good relations between persons of different racial groups

The GOC is committed to providing equal access to employment and the services it provides and will not discriminate on the grounds of race.

Employment duty

The employment duty requires the Council to monitor, by racial group, the numbers of staff in post and applicants for employment, training and promotion.

The results of this monitoring must be published annually. The results should be used to:

- see if there are differences in the way racial groups are treated
- investigate the underlying reasons for the differences
- deal with any unfairness, disadvantage or possible discrimination.

Disability equality

The general duty of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) states that a public authority must, when carrying out their functions, have due regard to the need to do six things:

1. promote equality of opportunity between disabled people and other people
2. eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the DDA
3. eliminate harassment of disabled people that is related to disability
4. promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
5. encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

The GOC is committed to providing equal access to employment and the services it provides and will not discriminate on the grounds of disability.

Gender equality

The Equality Act 2010 amends the Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) to place a statutory duty on all public authorities, when carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need:

- to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment
- to promote equality of opportunity between men and women, including those who are trans gender or transsexual.

The specific duties are:

1. to prepare and publish a gender equality scheme, showing how we will meet our general and specific duties and setting out our gender equality objectives
2. in formulating our overall objectives, to consider the need to include objectives to address the causes of any gender pay gap
3. to gather and use information on how our policies and practices affect gender equality in the workforce and in the delivery of services
4. to consult stakeholders (i.e. employees, service users and others, including trade unions) and take account of relevant information in order to determine our gender equality objectives
5. to assess the impact of our current and proposed policies and practices on gender equality
6. to implement the actions set out in our scheme within three years, unless it is unreasonable or impracticable to do so
7. to report against the scheme every year and review the scheme at least every three years.

The GOC is committed to providing equal access to employment and the services it provides and will not discriminate on the grounds of gender.

Age Equality

This policy is specific to the concerns of people of all ages and in particular younger and older people.

The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 make it unlawful to discriminate without justification on grounds of age in employment and vocational training. Age discrimination occurs because assumptions are made about older and younger people that are based on inaccurate, outdated and inappropriate stereotypes.

The GOC is committed to providing equal access to employment and the services it provides and will not discriminate on the grounds of age.

Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

This policy is specific to the concerns of men, women, bi-sexual people, gay men, lesbian women, transgender people and those who are undergoing or who have undergone gender re-assignment.

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 makes it unlawful to discriminate without justification on grounds of gender and the Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999 extend the protection provided by that Act to those undergoing or who have undergone gender reassignment. The Equality Act 2006 makes it unlawful, in the exercise of public functions, to discriminate on the grounds of gender or sexual orientation.

The GOC is committed to providing equal access to employment and the services it provides and will not discriminate on the grounds of gender, gender reassignment or sexual orientation.

Religion and Belief Equality

This policy is specific to the concerns of people from different faith groups.

The Equality Act 2006 makes it unlawful to discriminate, without justification, on grounds of religion or belief by treating a person less favourably or by subjecting them to victimisation or harassment.

The GOC is committed to providing equal access to employment and the services it provides and will not discriminate on the grounds of religion or belief.

The Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order 1998

This law prohibits discrimination and harassment on the grounds of religious belief and political opinion

Purpose of the key duties

The duties are primarily concerned with promoting and securing equality of opportunity and *fair participation* in employment for members of the Protestant community in Northern Ireland and members of the Roman Catholic community in Northern Ireland.

The GOC is committed to prohibiting discrimination and harassment on the grounds of religious belief and /or political opinion.