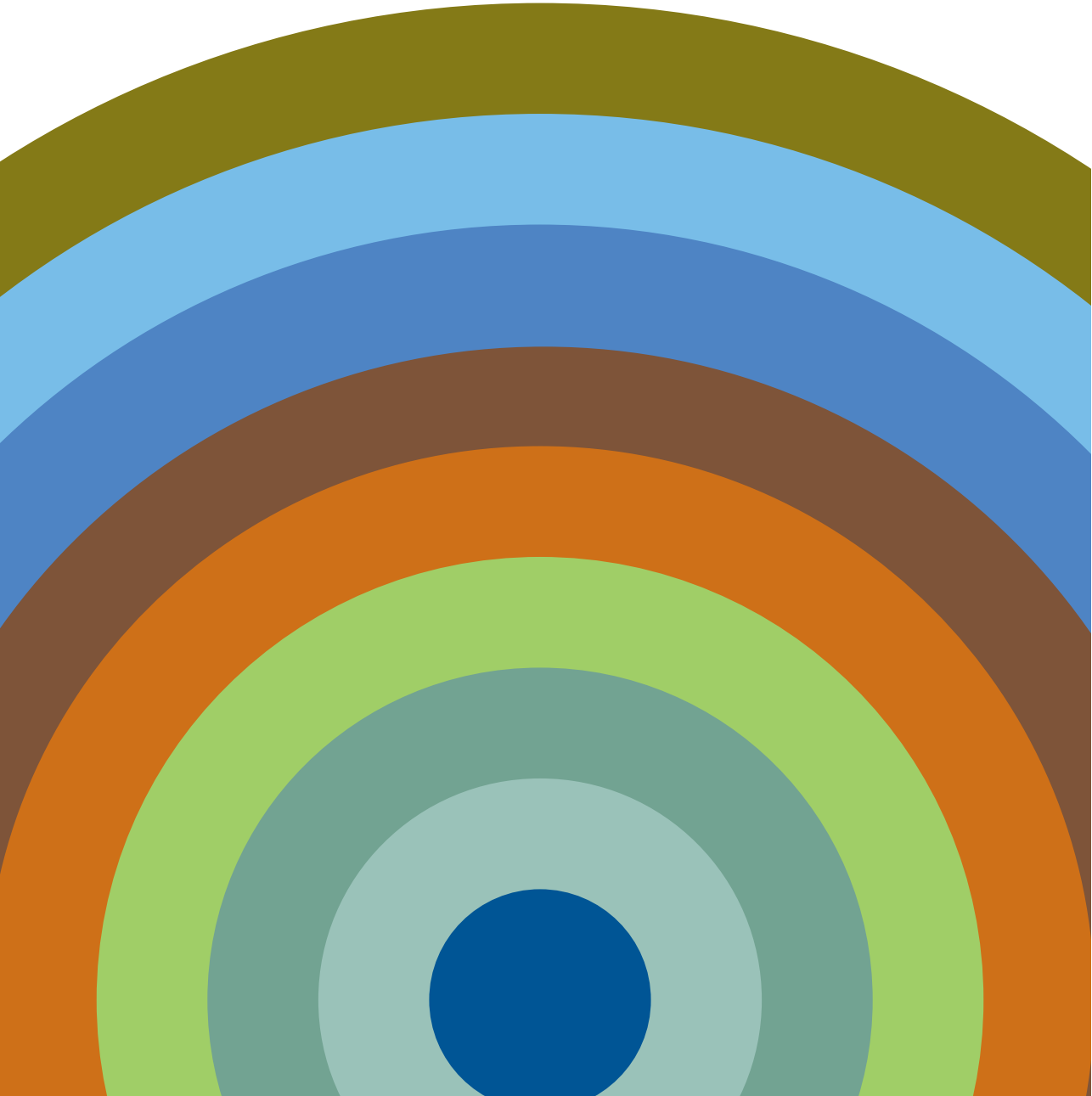


Annual Report
2006/7



Contents



03	Chairman's introduction
04	Chief Executive's introduction
07	Assuring independence
08	Supporting and advancing good practice
10	Ensuring educational quality
12	Crossing borders
14	Registering optical professionals
16	The opticians register - facts and figures
19	Registered specialties
20	Sustaining competence
22	Upholding standards
24	Protecting the public
26	Fitness to practise - facts and figures
29	Our Council
30	Our staff
32	Hearings panel members
33	Visitor panel members
34	Working with others
37	Helping consumers
38	Independent auditor's report
40	Income and expenditure
41	Balance sheet

confidence in optical professionals
competent, ethical, professional
confidence in the register
transparent, secure, reliable,
authoritative confidence in optical
training and education rigorous,
comprehensive confidence in
standards of care safe, high quality
confidence in ongoing competence
up to date, fit to practise confidence
in our systems and procedures
effective, efficient, proportionate,
fair confidence in our ways of
working inclusive, accountable

GOC at a glance

The GOC is the regulator for the optical professions in the UK. Our mission is to protect the public by promoting high standards of education and conduct amongst opticians.

The Council currently registers around 22,000 optometrists, dispensing opticians, student opticians and optical businesses.

We have four core functions:

1. Setting standards for optical education and training, performance and conduct.
2. Approving qualifications leading to registration.
3. Maintaining a register of individuals who are qualified and fit to practise, train or carry on business as optometrists and dispensing opticians.
4. 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 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.

Chairman's introduction

Building and sustaining confidence is core to professional regulation.

By assuring standards, the GOC enables the public and service users to have confidence in registered optometrists and dispensing opticians. In turn, professionals and the public need to have confidence in us as a regulator - to be reassured that our systems and procedures are fair, proportionate and effective.

The past year has seen very significant advances, which will enhance confidence in the professions and in the GOC. In February, the Government published its long-awaited White Paper, *Trust, Assurance and Safety*. The policy framework it sets out brings an end to a long period of uncertainty for health professional regulation. It gives us the confidence to move forward with our reform agenda, which has strengthened our role in public protection, and which is endorsed by the White Paper.

In particular, the GOC's groundbreaking Continuing Education and Training scheme provides assurance that registrants are staying up to date in core competencies. The success of the first statutory cycle, which ended in December, has given us a strong foundation on which to develop systems for professional revalidation. The White Paper also endorses the decisions we have already taken to introduce an independent hearings function, and student registration.

As we move forward, we will continue to make patient safety our overriding concern. Optometry and dispensing optics are relatively low risk professions, but they play a vital role in the delivery of safe, high quality health care. In primary care, optometrists and dispensing opticians are now providing a wide range of services, including specialist services for people with low vision and diabetes. Our registrants work with some of the most vulnerable groups in society. Optical professionals are taking on greater clinical responsibilities with advances in practice, in particular those recognised by our registerable specialties in contact lens practice and therapeutic prescribing.

As a Council, our confidence in facing the challenges ahead derives in large part from the very successful partnerships which we now have in place with a wide range of stakeholders. I would like to give my personal thanks to all the many individuals and organisations who have contributed to our work and successes over the past year. I personally have very great confidence in our future.

Rosie Varley



Rosie Varley

Chief Executive's introduction

One of the key tenets of the Government's White Paper is that professional regulation must sustain the confidence of both the public and the professions through demonstrable impartiality.



Peter Coe

Our challenge as a Council is to maintain our independence without losing the immense value of our partnerships.

Over the past year, we have worked closely with groups representing many of those parties with an interest in optical regulation, including registrants, patients, employers, educators, other regulators and government. Their input and support has allowed us to make real progress in improving the regulatory framework to promote good eye care and protect the public.

I am often asked when I meet registrants, 'What has the GOC ever done for me?'. I hope that this report will help answer that question. We work always and only for the public good - for as those who set up the Council realised, in the long term, the professions can only benefit from a strong, independent regulatory framework. The GOC continues to protect the public by promoting high standards of education, including continuing education, and conduct.

We have made real progress. The first cycle of statutory CET has been a significant success. Recognised specialties are being further developed to enable practitioners to enhance their practice along a defined route. We are engaging with European and global challenges to support free movement of professionals within a context of public safety. Information on the public register is more detailed, and more accessible. And we have taken action to clarify the legal framework for sale and supply of optical appliances, and to ensure compliance where there are public health or safety issues.

The number of optometrists and dispensing opticians falling below expected standards remains extremely low. But where there have been concerns about registrants, these have been dealt with firmly and fairly. We are also working to communicate our role in tackling concerns, and the importance and benefits of good eye care, to the public. Central to the public's understanding of eye safety and health are the clinical functions reserved to optometrists and dispensing opticians in the Opticians Act. The GOC jealously guards these protected functions as well as the professions' protected titles. Registrants must also play a role in guarding the unique contribution that they bring as optometrists and dispensing opticians to the health and safety of the public.

The optical professions reap the benefits of the Council's work in the form of public confidence and enhanced professional status. Such things are relatively difficult to measure. However, our own performance indicators suggest: so far, so good.

Peter Coe

2006/7 in focus

- 17,500,000** sight tests*
- 129** complaints to the GOC
- 22** registrants referred to FTP Committee
- 13** registrants referred for performance assessment or review
- 3** interim orders for suspension from the register
- 2** registrants erased from the register

*Based on FODO's Sight Test Volume and Workforce Survey, 2006



Assuring independence

Over the past year, the Council has striven to ensure that it is an independent and effective regulator.

In February 2007, the Government published a white paper on the future of health professional regulation. *Trust, Assurance and Safety: The Regulation of Health Professionals in the 21st Century* aims to ensure the independence of the regulators, in order to exercise their functions effectively and command the confidence of patients, the public and the professions.

The General Optical Council welcomed its publication and is now working with the Government and others to implement the Paper's recommendations. At our meeting in March, the Council agreed to propose reducing its size to a maximum of 13 members, with a majority of lay members. Members endorsed the White Paper recommendation that Councils should become smaller and more 'board-like' to allow for more effective decision-making. Council also set up a project board to take forward work associated with this and other recommendations.

The White Paper implementation project board will oversee four work streams, focusing on the themes of 'governance', 'revalidation', 'tackling concerns', and 'registration'. The board will also ensure appropriate consultation with and involvement of stakeholders in the project.



Principles

The White Paper set out key principles underpinning statutory professional regulation:

- Its overriding interest should be the safety and quality of the care that patients receive from health professionals.
- Professional regulation needs to sustain the confidence of both the public and the professions through demonstrable impartiality. Regulators need to be independent of government, the professionals themselves, employers, educators and all the other interest groups involved in healthcare.
- Professional regulation should be as much about sustaining, improving and assuring the professional standards of the overwhelming majority of health professionals as it is about identifying and addressing poor practice or bad behaviour.
- Professional regulation should not create unnecessary burdens, but be proportionate to the risk it addresses and the benefits it brings.
- The system must ensure the strength and integrity of health professionals within the United Kingdom but be sufficiently flexible to work effectively for the different needs and approaches across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as to adapt to future changes.

Supporting and advancing good practice

A key role for Council is setting the standards that must be achieved to gain entry onto the register and maintained by registrants once on the register. We work in close partnership with the professions and government to ensure the standards set by Council sustain and improve the levels of conduct and performance expected of optometrists and dispensing opticians.

Competencies

Council's Standards Committee is charged with keeping under review the competencies required for qualification as an optometrist or a dispensing optician, and also those competencies which must be achieved for approved specialties to be marked against a practitioner's name in the register.

Early in 2006, Standards Committee began the first stage of a strategic review of the competencies. The review has looked at the overall framework for competencies to ensure that the different sets of competencies share a common structure and terminology.

The project has taken into account influential work undertaken by the Optometrists Association Australia and the World Council of Optometry. Creating a unified competency framework across optics in the United Kingdom should make it easier to compare the skills and achievements of optical professionals qualifying in the UK with those qualifying overseas.

A consultation on the first stage of the review will take place in Summer 2007. The second stage of the review, which will consider the content of the competencies, will commence in 2008.

Standards of conduct and performance

The Council sets clear standards of conduct and performance expected of optometrists, dispensing opticians, student registrants, and business registrants. Codes of conduct for individual registrants (including student registrants) and business registrants set out the core standards.

Council also keeps under review the detailed guidance issued by the professional and representative bodies on matters covered by the codes. Practitioners are expected to be familiar with this guidance. Reference may be made to it in the exercise of the GOC's functions (for example when investigating allegations about a registrant's fitness to practise).

A key project in 2006/7 has been the review of the College of Optometrists' and the Association of British Dispensing Opticians' guidance on the sale and supply of optical appliances. Guidelines were examined to ensure that they were in synergy with changes to the law that were introduced in 2005.

A key project in 2006/7 has been the review of the College of Optometrists' and the Association of British Dispensing Opticians' guidance on the sale and supply of optical appliances.

Standards challenges

To ensure that standards for good practice and conduct are widely accepted, understood and followed by the eye care professions:

- Review the competency framework for prescribing optometrists to ensure it is fit for purpose should independent prescribing of medicines be introduced
- Establish a unified competency framework across optics in the United Kingdom
- Introduce a proportionate and targeted system for the revalidation of optometrists and dispensing opticians in the light of the directions of the Government's White Paper, *Trust, Assurance and Safety*
- Ensure professional guidance reflects learning from our investigation and fitness to practise processes.



Ensuring educational quality

Confidence in the register depends on the GOC monitoring the entry of appropriately qualified individuals to practise in the UK.

The GOC defines the content and standards of the education and training required to achieve the competencies for registration. It monitors and approves UK education, training and assessments leading to registration as opticians, optometrists or specialists.

For the UK route to registration, only those people who have been registered as students and who have successfully completed a GOC-approved training programme and approved assessment may practise in the UK.

Visits

Quality-assurance of courses and assessments is managed by a programme of visits, carried out by an independent panel of visitors. Visits aim to give the Council and the public confidence that practitioners who enter the register have been appropriately trained and assessed as competent and fit to practise.

In 2006, the GOC re-appointed its panel of visitors. Visitors were appointed to include dispensing opticians, optometrists, educationists and ophthalmologists. The selection process was followed by three days of training.

In 2006/7, Education Committee and its visitors participated in 63 quality assurance visits and meetings.

The main challenge for optometry training establishments has been to give students enough experience with patients. The GOC recommends minimum numbers of patient episodes to ensure that students are competent to carry out appropriate techniques and identify ocular pathology. Sufficient exposure to different patient scenarios is also critical to enable students to provide a credible service during their practice placements.

Education challenges

To ensure systems for accrediting optical training and qualifications, and for continuing education, promote and maintain high standards and meet public health needs:

- Continue to develop and implement systems for the accreditation of courses and examinations in optometry and dispensing optics
- Enable free movement of professionals and students whilst maintaining quality standards
- Input into the education aspects of the CET scheme, including implementation of the new principles and requirements
- Work with providers to develop training and examination programmes for independent prescribing if appropriate.

Visits aim to give the Council and the public confidence that practitioners who enter the register have been appropriately trained and assessed as competent and fit to practise.

The GOC has made several visits to practice placements for students following the introduction of the new scheme for registration of UK-trained optometrists. The scheme was initiated by the Council and implemented by the College of Optometrists. Throughout the current year the GOC has continued to meet with the College, and made several recommendations for changes, particularly focusing on the balance between assessments in practice and the final assessment. A key challenge is ensuring that practice placement assessors and final assessment examiners receive adequate training and guidance, in order to apply common standards. The GOC will visit the final assessment again in 2007.

The Education Committee has also continued its programme of work to introduce revised training programmes and final assessments for the ophthalmic dispensing profession which reflect the needs of today's population. The Committee has tried to ensure that the functions reserved to the optical professions, particularly low vision, are adequately represented in student practical experience and assessment.



Partnerships

Maintaining standards for optical education and assessment depends on partnership with training establishments and assessment bodies. The GOC has continued to work with the training and assessment bodies to achieve mutual trust and understanding. Education Committee keeps under review a series of handbooks setting out in detail what is required for the accreditation of any programme of training or assessment. The handbooks are designed to give education partners the confidence that the GOC will make good judgements based on fair processes. They are used by visitors in order to make informed, evidence-based judgements on whether to advise the Council to grant approval.

Table of Visits 1 April 2006 - 31 March 2007	Panel visits	Management meetings	Education Committee visits	Clinical placement visits	Visits to assessments
Existing programmes	6	9	0	0	1

New courses and assessments

Dispensing optics courses	0	12	5	0	0
Foundations degrees (dispensing optics)	0	3	3	0	0
E-learning courses (dispensing optics)	0	1	1	0	0
New scheme for registration (optometry)	0	6	9	0	2
Therapeutic prescribing	0	4	0	1	3
ECCO Diploma	0	3	0	0	0

Crossing borders

The General Optical Council has been proactive in promoting the free movement of students and qualified professionals, with appropriate safeguards for patient safety.



In June 2006, the Council confirmed its policy on the Bologna Agreement – a number of voluntary objectives to set common European educational directions and priorities:

In order to safeguard the standards of optometry and ophthalmic dispensing in the United Kingdom, and so as to enhance student mobility, the General Optical Council wishes to conform to the spirit of the Bologna Agreement. The Council recognises that the first steps will be to investigate and resolve any barriers to the free mobility of optometry and ophthalmic dispensing students within Europe.

Implementing our Bologna policy

Initial work to review and update the core curriculum in dispensing optics is complete. A review of the undergraduate optometry curriculum is underway. The Council is also preparing a summary of the optical and optometric scope of practice in the major European Economic Area (EEA) countries. The framework will identify significant differences between the UK scope of practice and that of other European countries and any remedial training required prior to full registration in the UK.

Ensuring patient safety

Our Bologna policy has needed to accommodate tensions between the European agenda, of economic well being through an open monetary and trade market and free movement rights for workers, with the GOC's mission to safeguard the ocular well being of the UK public. Government proposals for better patient protection will mean increased regulation of UK healthcare professionals. European-qualified optometrists and dispensing opticians moving into the UK should be subject to the same level of registration and regulation.

As a member of the Alliance of UK Health Regulators on Europe (AURE), the GOC has been working with the UK Department of Health to ensure that patient safety issues are addressed as the new EC Qualifications Directive is transposed into UK law. Legislation is due to come into effect in October 2007. AURE and the GOC have significant concerns about regulators' ability to maintain their control over the competencies required for practice in the UK. AURE regulators have raised concerns about language competence and their ability to check the fitness to practise of EU professionals providing temporary services in the UK.

European health strategy

Throughout 2006, the GOC has joined its partners in AURE in responding to an ever-widening European health discussion. This has included responding to the Commission's consultations on health strategy and community action on health services. These discussions present an opportunity to reflect on the wider European agenda and to consider the definition of citizen well being – putting health as well as wealth at its core.



Registering optical professionals

The Council publishes a register of all optometrists, dispensing opticians, student opticians and optical businesses who are qualified and fit to practise, train or carry on business in the UK. The registers are publicly available on the Council's website. They give the public, other professionals and employers confidence that an optician is legally entitled to practise.

Practitioners need to renew their registration annually.

They must:

- maintain an up-to-date contact address with the GOC
- provide details of any criminal convictions, cautions or investigations
- notify the Council of any investigations by a primary care organisation
- confirm that they are in good physical and mental health
- confirm they have appropriate professional indemnity insurance
- provide evidence of having completed the minimum requirement for Continuing Education and Training (CET)*
- pay the annual retention fee (£169 for full registration in the year 2006/7)

*at the end of each three-year CET cycle

By March 2007, some 17,887 individual registrants and registered corporate bodies successfully renewed their registrations. This period, and the period of student retention, are always busy times for the GOC's registration department. The department has put in place improved systems to speed up the receipt, processing and retrieval of large numbers of forms.

This year saw the conclusion to the first three-year cycle of Continuing Education and Training. Compliance with CET became a statutory requirement from 30 June 2005. Practitioners were required to earn and confirm their minimum points requirement by 31 December 2006 in order to renew their registration for 2007/8. In the final outcome, 98 per cent of registrants met the requirement, with just 319 individuals removed from the registers for non-compliance.

Future challenges

The Council's registration function will need to continue to maintain the accuracy of the registers in the context of increasingly complex and demanding information requirements. The current system of CET provides assurance that registrants are staying up to date. Following the Government's recent White Paper, *Trust, Assurance and Safety*, it is likely that in future a system for 'revalidation' will be introduced. Revalidation will give the public increasing confidence that registered professionals are competent and fit to practise. The White Paper will also develop the question of how registrants' 'good character' will be determined, reflect on our learnings from the registration of students and shape equality and diversity issues.

Meanwhile, the EU Qualifications Directive will create new requirements for registering qualified professionals coming to practise in the UK from other EU states.

With much on the horizon, the GOC's registration team will continue to work conscientiously to ensure efficient and cost-effective registration.

Student registration

Since 30 June 2005, it has been a legal requirement for optometry and dispensing optics students to be registered with the Council. In June 2007 there were 4,166 students on the Council's registers.

Registering optical professionals qualified outside the UK

The Council occasionally registers practitioners with qualifications from outside the UK. Professionals from within the European Union (EU) or European Economic Area (EEA) apply under a separate scheme from non-EEA applicants.

For European applicants, their qualifications and practical experience are assessed by the Council's overseas qualifications sub-committee. If an applicant does not have sufficient knowledge or experience to be registered with the GOC immediately, they may take an aptitude test, or undergo an adaptation period involving further training at a GOC-approved UK training establishment. An adaptation period may last up to one year.

Non-EEA applicants are required to take an assessment examination. Examinations take place twice a year.



2006/7

EU/EEA applications received	23
EU/EEA applicants registered	26
Non-EEA applications received	21
Non-EEA registered	16

NOTE: Registrations may exceed applications where an individual is registered in a subsequent year to the one in which they apply.

Registration challenges

To ensure accurate, efficient and cost-effective registration:

- Implement and harmonise registration requirements for EU Recognition of Professional Qualifications Directive, UK Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Acts
- Increase the usability and accessibility of the registers, ensuring maintained security and reliability
- In the light of the Government's White Paper: develop a definition of 'good character'; refinements to the system for registering students; review the GOC's work to date and develop proposals for revalidation.

The opticians register: facts and figures

During 2006/7 both optical professions grew in size. The overall number of full registrants increased by just over two per cent to 16,002. The total number of registered optometrists increased by almost three per cent to 10,699, and that of dispensing opticians rose by one-and-a-half per cent to 5,303. A further 220 bodies corporate were added to the Council's registers, bringing the total to 1,367.

Optometrists

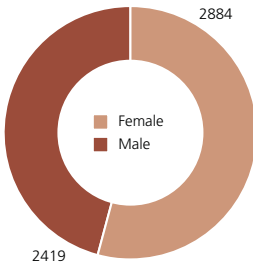
England	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
male	4038	4136	4285	4268	4289
female	3603	3818	4060	4253	4442
Scotland					
male	422	429	444	453	454
female	455	469	500	527	557
Wales					
male	278	263	271	264	269
female	203	218	234	237	250
N Ireland					
male	165	167	173	178	184
female	185	210	230	239	254
Totals					
male	4903	4995	5173	5163	5196
female	4446	4715	5024	5256	5503
Grand totals	9349	9710	10197	10419	10699

Dispensing opticians

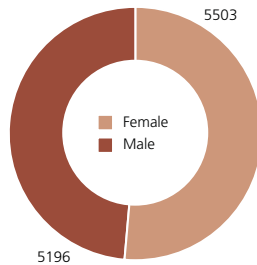
England	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
male	2256	2262	2261	2196	2174
female	2249	2345	2419	2511	2596
Scotland					
male	133	131	134	133	136
female	146	149	159	165	173
Wales					
male	85	80	81	85	91
female	79	87	92	90	94
N Ireland					
male	15	18	20	19	18
female	10	12	17	20	21
Totals					
male	2489	2491	2496	2433	2419
female	2484	2593	2687	2786	2884
Grand totals	4973	5084	5183	5219	5303

The number of registered optometrists increased by almost 3% to 10,699, and that of dispensing opticians by 1.5% to 5,303. 220 bodies corporate were added to the Council's registers, bringing the total to 1,367.

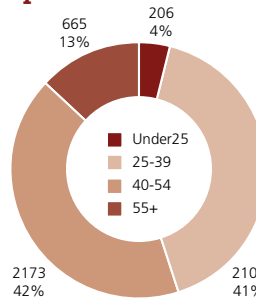
Gender of dispensing opticians



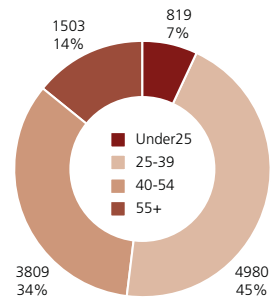
Gender of optometrists



Age of dispensing opticians



Age of optometrists



Age of registrants

Fully registered dispensing opticians were evenly distributed between the age ranges of 25-54. The highest number of registered optometrists were between 25-39. Over half of all registrants are over 40 years of age.

Gender of registrants

Female optometrists and dispensing opticians continue to outnumber their male counterparts. Since 2005/6, the number of female dispensing opticians has risen by just over three per cent to 2,884. Female optometrists increased in numbers by over four per cent to 5,303.

Student registrants

Institution	No. of students
Anglia Ruskin University	554
Association of British Dispensing Opticians	544
Bradford College	150
Cardiff University	309
City and Islington College	402
City University London	460
College of Optometrists	166
Glasgow Caledonian University	340
Institute of Optometry	2
University of Aston	452
University of Bradford	417
University of Manchester	244
University of Ulster	126
Total	4166



Registered specialties

Three registerable specialties mean optometrists and dispensing opticians now have greater opportunities for advancing their practice in specialist areas of skill and knowledge.

Experience and training

Becoming a specialist practitioner involves extra study and experience of clinical practice. A registered specialty gives assurance that a practitioner is equipped with the expertise required to perform additional duties.

The Council's Contact Lens specialty is for dispensing opticians only. A specialist contact lens practitioner is qualified to assess whether contact lenses meet the needs of a patient. They can provide the individual with one or more contact lenses for use during a trial period and provide after care.

Both the Additional Supply and Supplementary Prescribing specialties are open to optometrists only. Additional supply practitioners are qualified to write orders for, and supply in an emergency, a range of drugs in addition to those which can be ordered or supplied by a normal optometrist.

Registrants with a supplementary prescribing specialty are qualified to manage a patient's clinical condition and prescribe medicines according to a clinical management plan set up in conjunction with an independent prescriber, such as a GP or ophthalmologist.

In June 2007, there were 1,147 practitioners with a registered contact lens specialty. A total of 17 optometrists had registered the Additional Supply specialty, whilst ten had registered both the Additional Supply and Supplementary Prescribing specialties.

Continuing Education and Training (CET)

Registrants with a specialty are required to earn one additional CET point for each two full months of specialty registration in addition to the general CET requirement. Points are needed for each registered specialty.

Registration process

If an optometrist or dispensing optician performs specialist work without the appropriate entry in the register, the Council may treat this as evidence of impaired fitness to practise.

Practitioners can register a specialty free of charge by completing an application for entry of a specialty form, and returning it to the Council's registration team, together with a copy of their qualification certificate. Registrants must renew their specialty entry during the annual retention process.

Specialties

For optometrists

Additional supply

Supplementary prescribing

For dispensing opticians

Contact lenses

Practitioners with registered specialties

Specialty	No. registered
Contact lens*	1147
Supplementary prescribing and additional supply**	10
Additional supply**	17

* dispensing opticians only

** optometrists only

Sustaining competence



The GOC's mandatory Continuing Education and Training (CET) scheme gives users of eye care services the confidence that registrants have maintained their professional and technical knowledge and skills at the level required for registration.

The first cycle

The first three-year cycle of the GOC's CET scheme came to a successful end on 31 December 2006.

More than 98 per cent of registrants achieved their CET target for continued registration from 1 April 2007. At this date just 319 registrants were removed from the register for failing to achieve the requisite number of CET points. This total included 123 optometrists and 196 dispensing opticians. In addition, 15 dispensing opticians who achieved their general CET target but failed to achieve their specialty points had their specialty removed.

The Council's partner optical bodies contributed significant support to help registrants earn and confirm CET points. CET providers played a key role in ensuring adequate provision, particularly in therapeutic prescribing specialties. The scheme administrator, Vantage Technologies Ltd, provided a high level of service, including in many cases one-to-one personal support to registrants.

Both professions showed real commitment to maintaining standards. Compliance amongst dispensing opticians was high, demonstrating significant commitment to remaining members of a regulated profession. The Council will continue to support the efforts of the ABDO and others in securing CET funding for dispensing opticians.

Information from the first cycle report will be used to help with planning the present CET cycle and future development of the scheme.

More than 98% of registrants achieved their CET target for continued registration from 1 April 2007.

CET facts and figures

In the first cycle, over 750,000 points were entered on www.cetoptics.com.

Optometrists were most likely to earn more points than the minimum requirement, with 52 confirmed points per optometrist on average. Dispensing opticians earned and confirmed an average of 41 points each. Contact lens specialists earned an average of 50 general and 26 specialist points each.

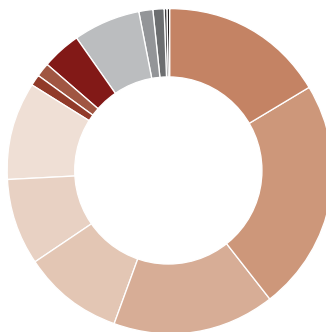
A total of 280 registered CET providers submitted around 6,500 events for approval.

Provision was significantly higher in some competency areas than others. Contact lens practice CET was most plentiful, with over 800 events run, followed by optical examination and technique, and ocular abnormalities. These subjects were also the most popular.

Other than prescribing specialties, the least well covered competency was low vision, with just five events available and 142 points awarded. There was also low uptake for binocular vision courses, with fewer than 500 CET points awarded in this competency. There was a similarly poor uptake of CET relating to professional conduct. The GOC will investigate the reasons for this variation and consider how it can encourage higher uptake across all competency areas.

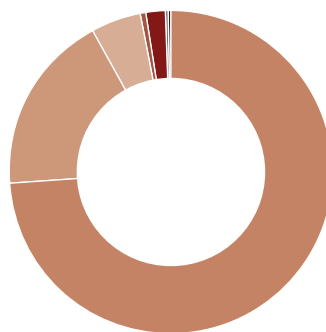
Lectures were the most common form of provision, with nearly 3,500 available. Registrants could also choose from 880 workshops, 241 peer review events and 131 distance learning articles. Highest uptake was for text based distance learning, which accounted for just over 60 per cent of points awarded.

Range of competencies covered by provision



- Optical examination and technique 15.2%
- Contact lens practice 21.3%
- Ocular abnormalities 14.7%
- Optical appliances 9.5%
- Contact lenses 7.8%
- Communication skills 9.0%
- Ocular examination 9.3%
- Refractive management 1.4%
- Visual function 3.6%
- Professional conduct 6.1%
- Additional supply competencies 1.3%
- Binocular vision 0.7%
- Low vision 0.1%
- Supplementary prescribing competencies 0.1%

Modality of provision



- Lecture 74.1%
- Skills workshop 18.7%
- Peer review 5.1%
- Text based distance learning 0.3%
- Visual recognition test 1.7%
- Video based learning 0.02%
- Poster session 0.1%

Upholding standards

The GOC encourages patients and the public to notify us of concerns about optical professionals. We aim to take swift and appropriate action where a registrant's fitness to practise is impaired.

Investigating complaints

The investigation team continue to strive to make it easy for patients and others to report concerns to the Council about a registered optician. Initial contact is by telephone, giving people the chance to raise concerns and discuss procedure before making a formal allegation.

Some issues may be referred to another body for investigation or resolution. Most complaints are referred to the Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS) and Trading Standards (consumer queries), or to local Primary Care Trusts (NHS voucher issues).

Investigation processes

Reforms to the Opticians Act, which came into effect in June 2005, have resulted in improvements to the investigations process. The average time from receiving a complaint to a decision by the Investigation Committee is between 4-6 months. New powers mean the Council can obtain original records within 14 days. Since January 2006, the Council now takes a full witness statement from the patient. Witness statements provide a clearer picture than the previous self-completion question sheets, and can be used at a Fitness to Practise hearing, if the case is referred.

Investigation Committee

Investigation Committee meets six times a year to consider cases. In addition to referring a case for a formal hearing of the Fitness to Practise Committee, they can invite a registrant to attend an informal performance review in order to receive extra training, or order a formal assessment of performance. The Committee can also issue a warning, or direct no further action if they are satisfied there is no evidence of impaired fitness to practise.

Interim orders

Where there is a public protection issue, the Council can apply for an interim order to suspend a registrant or impose conditions of practice whilst awaiting a full hearing. Interim orders are granted by the Fitness to Practise Committee. The Council has applied for three interim orders this year. Two orders were granted, both against student optometrists in relation to conduct issues.

Reforms to the Opticians Act, which came into effect in June 2005, have resulted in improvements to the investigations process.

Independent hearings

Since July 2005, fitness to practise and registration appeals cases have been heard by an independent hearings panel. The system protects registrants' human rights and ensures greater transparency and accountability for decisions about registration. The panels aim to ensure decisions are fair and just and that determinations contain clear reasons for their decision.

The Fitness to Practise Committee hears cases referred to it by the Investigation Committee. At substantive hearings the Committee hears a wide range of allegations and it has the ability to impose sanctions on the registrant.

The Registration Appeals Committee considers appeals from prospective student optometrists or student dispensing opticians whose application for registration has been refused by the Registrar. It also considers applications for restoration from ex-registrants who have been previously erased from the register through the fitness to practise process.



Fitness to practise challenges

To ensure the integrity and effectiveness of FTP investigation and adjudication systems:

- Consider responses to the Government's regulation White Paper, including: consider the investigation process from a local level and ways to work with primary care organisations; consider the implications of moving the hearings function to an independent body and changing the standard of proof adopted by the Council
- Analyse types of claims investigated by the Investigation Committee and communicate learning outcomes to registrants
- Enhance training for performance assessors.

Protecting the public

The GOC, through the Opticians Act, has public protection as its core purpose. One way in which the Act seeks to protect the public is to ensure that only those who are qualified and registered are able to legally undertake certain restricted activities or use certain professional titles.

The following activities are restricted by the Act:

- Testing sight can only be carried out by a registered optometrist or medical practitioner (section 24)
- Fitting contact lenses can only be carried out by a registered optometrist, dispensing optician¹ or medical practitioner (section 25)
- Spectacles may only be sold by, or under the supervision of, a registered optometrist, dispensing optician or medical practitioner (section 27) other than those which are exempt under section 27(2) of the Act or the Sale of Optical Appliances Order 1984
- Zero-powered contact lenses can only be sold by, or under the supervision of, a registered optometrist, dispensing optician or medical practitioner (section 27)
- Powered contact lenses can only be sold by, or under the supervision or general direction of, a registered optometrist, dispensing optician or medical practitioner
- Titles such as ophthalmic optician, optometrist, dispensing optician, or optician may only be used by persons or corporate bodies who are in the appropriate registers (section 28).

A breach of these restrictions will constitute a criminal offence.

In 2006/7, the Council specifically considered the issue of patient health and safety regarding the sale and supply of optical appliances. We have worked to ensure the law relating to this area was understood, and sought detailed advice. In October 2006, Council issued a statement clarifying the position.

We have also worked with the College of Optometrists and the Association of British Dispensing Opticians to ensure their detailed guidance on the sale and supply of optical appliances was in synergy with the law.

As part of our public protection role, the Council is concerned with ensuring that there is compliance with the law. Under our Protocol for the Investigation and Prosecution of Criminal Offences, we may seek an undertaking from a suspected offender that they will comply with the law. If no undertaking is received, the Council may prosecute in the public interest.

Complaints about criminal offences 2006/7:

S24	2	(1 NFA, 1 transferred to FTP)
S25	0	–
S27	18	(3 NFA, 15 under investigation)
S28	6	(2 NFA, 4 under investigation)

¹Dispensing opticians may fit contact lenses if registered on the contact lens specialty register.



Fitness to practise: facts and figures



Complaints received by the Council:

2006-7 129	2005-6 146	2004-5 182
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The Council received 129 complaints in 2006/7. The number of complaints received has dropped year on year for the past three years.

Of the total number of complaints, 14 per cent were withdrawn by the complainant before reaching Investigation Committee. Investigation Committee referred 32 per cent of cases heard for further action. Overall, 17 per cent of complaints received by the Council resulted in a referral to the Fitness to Practise Committee.

Most complaints received were from individual members of the public (82 per cent). Concerns about optometrists were most frequently reported (78 per cent). Twelve per cent related to dispensing opticians.

Clinical matters were more prevalent than conduct issues. Incorrect prescriptions were the single largest cause for complaints (28 per cent).

Investigation Committee outcomes

No further action	56
Withdrawn	18
Performance review	4
Performance assessment	9
Fitness to Practise referral	22
Under investigation	18
No jurisdiction	2

Sources of complaints

Individuals	106
Primary care organisations	9
Registrants	6
Employers/universities	5
Counter Fraud Service	1
Police circular	2

Subjects of complaints

Optometrists	138
Dispensing opticians	21
Student registrants	4
Bodies corporate	15

Reasons for complaints Issues relating to:

Fraud	5
Testing of sight of unregistered	4
Convictions	4
Conduct	2
Advertising	2
Spectacle prescriptions	37
Fitting/dispensing	3
Glaucoma	4
Cataracts	11
Contact lenses	11
Macular degeneration	5
Management of child patients	3
Macular hole	2
Ocular melanoma	2
Retinal detachments	2
Other clinical	5
Other miscellaneous	27

NOTE: some cases involve multiple registrants

14% of cases notified to the GOC were withdrawn by the patient before reaching Investigation Committee. 32% of cases heard by Investigation Committee were referred for further action. Overall, 17% of cases notified to the Council resulted in a referral to the Fitness to Practise Committee.

Summary of hearings 2006/7

Cases referred to the Fitness to Practise Committee in 2006/7 included allegations of recording tests which had not been carried out, clinical incompetence, practising whilst not registered, substance misuse and patient abuse. Where a registrant's fitness to practise is found to be impaired, the Committee may erase a registrant from the register, suspend their registration, place conditions on their registration or impose a financial penalty order (not to exceed £50,000). Where a registrant's fitness to practise is not impaired, the Committee has the power to issue a warning about future conduct.

Fitness to Practise Committee outcomes

Erasures	2
Conditional registrations	2
Financial penalty orders	2
Interim orders (1 failed application)	3
Interim order review	1
Warnings	3
Procedural hearings	19

Two cases were heard by the Registration Appeals Committee in 2006/7.

One optometrist applicant for restoration was refused entry to the register. An appeal against a decision of the Registrar to refuse entry to the register of student dispensing opticians was dismissed.



Our Council

Council members

There are 28 members of Council, comprising optometrists, dispensing opticians, lay members, and ophthalmologists. The full Council meets in public three times a year, in March, June and November. Members attend a strategic seminar before each of the three meetings, to discuss key areas of the Council's work.

Members also contribute to committees, which carry out work delegated by Council. There are eight main committees: standards, education, registration, investigation, companies, finance and procedure, remuneration and audit. Committee meetings take place between one and six times a year.

Lay members

Morag Alexander
Moira Black
Ian Hamer
Geoffrey Harris
Stuart Heatherington
David Pyle
Mike Salmon
Rosie Varley
Sheila Wild

Optometrists

Roger Anderson
Donald Cameron
David Cartwright
Bob Chappell
Kevin Lewis
Gwyneth Morgan
Nick Rumney
Alan Tomlinson
Charles Wass

Dispensing opticians

Rosemary Bailey
Jennifer Brower
Keith Cavaye
Kim Devlin
James Russell
Jo Underwood

Ophthalmologists

Roger Buckley
James Dunne
Peter Kyle
Stuart Roxburgh

A table showing members' attendance at Council and committee meetings is available on our website, www.optical.org.



Our staff

The GOC employs 26 staff at our offices in Harley Street, London.

We strive to provide an inclusive, supportive working environment. We are committed to the principles of diversity and equality of opportunity.

The Council is recognised as an Investor in People (IIP) organisation. IIP is a national standard awarded to organisations that demonstrate good practice in the management, training and development of their staff.

Registrar and Chief Executive's office

Chief Executive and Registrar
Peter Coe

Assistant to Chairman and Chief Executive
Linda Kennaugh



Education

Deputy Registrar and Director of Education
Dian Taylor

PA to Deputy Registrar/ Director of Education
Hayley Robinson

Assistant Director of Education
Lesa Oakley*

Education Officer
Agnieszka Knapik

Standards

Director of Standards
Jon Levett

Project Support Officer
Maria Claridge

Registration

Registration and IT Manager
Alan Currie

Registration Assistants
Fiona Leech (to August 07)

Lisa Brent

Kellie Bain

Sam Aldgate

Jeanne Wymer (from July 07)

Fitness to Practise investigations and criminal prosecutions

Director of Legal and FTP
Caroline Withall (to July 07)

Philip Grey (from July 07)

Solicitor and Criminal Prosecutions Manager
Nirupar Uddin

Legal Assistant
Hannah Gray (to August 07)
Kristy Hibberd (from July 07)

Hearings management

Hearings Manager
David Henley

Corporate resources

Director of Corporate Resources
Phil Ireland

PA to Directors of Corporate Resources, Legal and FTP, Standards
Joan Burrow

Finance

Finance Officer
Carol Ayton

Finance Assistant
Elizabeth Chambers

Human resources

Head of Human Resources
Lesa Oakley*

Office services

Services Officer
Arly Nielsen

Office Assistant
Georgina Devoy

Communications

Head of Communications
Kate Fielding

Communications Officer
Clare Millington

*dual role



Clockwise from top left: Arly Nielsen, Carol Ayton, Nirupar Uddin, Linda Kennaugh



Hearings panel members



There are currently 38 active hearings panel members.

The panel comprises 15 lay members, 15 optometrists and eight dispensing opticians. Both lay and professional members are recruited by an independent body through advertisements in the national and optical press. Members are appointed for a term of five years, with the option to serve for a further five years.

Panel members undergo comprehensive training throughout their tenure, including annual refresher sessions, self assessments and appraisals.

Lay members

Dozie Azubike
Alan Baldwin
Helga Drummond
Alistair Graham
Margaret Hallendorff
Vicki Harris
Robert Holdsworth
Geraldine Huka
Mercy Jeyasingham
Francesca Jones
Corinna Kershaw
Arif Khan
Peter North
Rodney Varley
Margaret Wall

Optometrists

Peter Charlesworth
Nizar Hirji
Alison Hudson
Gordon Ilett
Rakesh Kapoor
Mark Lomas
Janice McCrudden
Yvonne Norgett
Elizabeth O'Donoghue
Paul Reeves
Stephen Reily
Ronald Stevenson
Stephen Taylor
Helen Tilley
Catherine Viner

Dispensing opticians

Timothy Bowden
Andrew Cripps
Abilene Grute
Richard Hensley
Hilary King
Ravinder Plahay
Nigel Roberts
Susan Southgate

Visitor panel members

There are currently 18 members of the visitor panel, comprising dispensing opticians, optometrists, ophthalmologists and educationists (from higher/further education). Panel members visit training institutions and professional qualifying examinations to ensure high standards of education amongst dispensing opticians and optometrists.

In July 2006, the GOC recruited 14 new visitors to carry out the accreditation of training institutions. Visitors are not salaried but receive a daily fee. Appointments are made for an initial two years, subject to an annual review.

Training was given to all the visitors on the accreditation process and a number have already participated in visits to Cardiff University, Anglia Ruskin University and Ulster University.

Dispensing opticians

Christopher Burton
Christine Harm
Annette Latham-Jackson
Duncan Counter
Allison Thomas

Educationists

Reginald Davis
Bernard Gilmartin
Sally Powell
David Whitaker

Optometrists

Lisa Gerson
Robert Harper
Martin Rubinstein
Angela Whitaker
Richard Broughton

Ophthalmologists

Paul Baines
Ian Bryce
Ahmed Sadiq
Soupramanien Sandramouli



Working with others



The Council is committed to accountability and transparency in the conduct of its business. We aim to seek, and respond to, the views of stakeholders and partners. We explain and publicise decisions, and make public, wherever possible, Council information, activities and proceedings.

Council meetings and hearings are open to the public. Meeting agendas and papers and outcomes of hearings are published on our website. We also publish all key policies and procedures, and we carry out public consultations on new policies and rules.

We work inclusively with optical professional and representative bodies. In 2006/7, the GOC joined with other optical bodies and charities to promote eye health messages as part of the Eye Health Alliance.

We cooperate wherever possible with other UK healthcare regulators and the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence (CHRE), to develop consistency and best practice across professional regulation.

The GOC participates in the joint health and social care regulators' Public and Patient Involvement group, and in the past year we have contributed to several projects, including seminars on improving patient and public involvement in healthcare regulation.

We are currently developing a new stakeholder engagement strategy to reflect proposed changes to our governance structure, and ensure that the Council is able to consider the interests of patients, registrants and partner organisations in our policy and decision-making.

Helping consumers

The General Optical Council has been responsible for the funding and management of the Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS) for two years.

The OCCS is independently run. It provides an impartial mediation service between patients and practitioners to resolve consumer complaints relating to optical products and services.

The OCCS aims to bring patient and professional together to resolve matters amicably. Most complaints were successfully resolved in the year under review.

Complaints received

	2006	2005
Oct - Dec	164	215
Jul - Sept	212	203
Apr - Jun	195	212
Jan - Mar	204	216
	775	846

The volume of consumer complaints reduced in 2006 to 775, compared to 846 in 2005 and 782 in 2004. Most patients who contacted the OCCS in 2006 did so to seek advice on issues related to either dispensing problems or multifocal lenses. Most complaints were resolved informally or at practice level and usually within one month of the problem being raised with OCCS.

Where a complaint involves a registrant's fitness to practise, these incidents are referred to the GOC's legal department for consideration in the first instance.



Independent auditors' report to the members of the General Optical Council

This report is made solely to the General Optical Council's members, as a body. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the Council's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the Council and the Council's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Respective responsibilities of directors and auditors

The members of the Council are responsible for preparing the Annual Report* and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice). The Opticians Act 1989 requires the Council to keep accounts of all sums received or paid by them under the Act.

Our responsibility is to audit the financial statements in accordance with relevant legal and regulatory requirements and International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland).

We report to you our opinion as to whether the financial statements give a true and fair view and are properly prepared in accordance with the Opticians Act 1989, and whether the information given in the Report of the Council is consistent with the financial statements. We also report to you if, in our opinion, the Council has not kept proper accounting records, if we have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit, or if information specified by law regarding members' remuneration and transactions with the Council is not disclosed.

We read other information contained in the Annual Report, and consider whether it is consistent with the audited financial statements. This other information comprises only the Report of the Council. We consider the implications for our report if we become aware of any apparent misstatements or material inconsistencies with the financial statements. Our responsibilities do not extend to any other information.

* References to the 'Annual Report' here relate to the audited statutory *Report and Financial Statements 31 March 2007*, which are available from the GOC website.



Basis of opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland) issued by the Auditing Practices Board. An audit includes examination, on a test basis, of evidence relevant to the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements. It also includes an assessment of the significant estimates and judgements made by the members of the Council in the preparation of the financial statements, and of whether the accounting policies are appropriate to the Council's circumstances, consistently applied and adequately disclosed.

We planned and performed our audit so as to obtain all the information and explanations which we considered necessary in order to provide us with sufficient evidence to give reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement, whether caused by fraud or other irregularity or error. In forming our opinion we also evaluated the overall adequacy of the presentation of information in the financial statements.



In our opinion:

- the financial statements give a true and fair view, in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice, of the state of the Council's affairs at 31 March 2007 and of its surplus for the year then ended and have been properly prepared in accordance with the Opticians Act 1989; and
- the information given in the Report of the Council is consistent with the financial statements.

Baker Tilly UK Audit LLP, Registered Auditor, Chartered Accountants
2 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1B 3ST

Income and expenditure



	2007 £	2006 Restated £
Turnover		
Fees	3,198,704	3,159,466
Other operating income:		
Opticians Register	570	15,969
Sale of Computer Services	14,504	7,996
Other	30	1,022
	3,213,808	3,184,453
Operating expenditure		
Staff Employment	1,074,534	956,099
Business Services	1,178,683	1,150,151
Education	121,230	58,039
Legal Services	263,137	230,980
FTP	159,156	133,855
IT Services	33,612	21,358
Communications	83,227	24,238
Standards	9,616	30,034
	2,923,195	2,604,754
Operating surplus	290,613	579,699
Interest receivable and other income	211,397	155,617
Surplus on ordinary activities before taxation	502,010	735,316
Corporation tax	(35,372)	(28,971)
Surplus on ordinary activities after taxation	466,638	706,345
Transfers:		
Legal Costs Contingency Reserve	-	(900,000)
Retained surplus/(deficit) for year	466,638	(193,655)
Retained surplus at beginning of year	303,871	497,526
Retained surplus at end of year	770,509	303,871

Balance sheet

	2007	2006
	£	£
Tangible fixed assets	69,936	72,203
Current assets		
Other debtors	17,334	13,408
Prepayments and accrued income	66,677	73,625
Building society deposits	1,161,908	1,125,712
Cash at bank and in hand	4,201,612	3,245,587
	5,447,531	4,458,332
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	(3,146,958)	(2,626,664)
Net current assets	2,300,573	1,831,668
Total assets less current liabilities	2,370,509	1,903,871
Reserves and funds		
Optical Education, Research and Public Purposes Fund	100,000	100,000
Legal Costs Contingency Reserve	1,500,000	1,500,000
Income and Expenditure Account	770,509	303,871
Total funds employed	2,370,509	1,903,871

The financial statements were approved and authorised by the Council on 28 June 2007 and were signed on its behalf by:

Moira Black

Honorary Treasurer

Peter Coe

Registrar and Chief Executive



Promoting good eye care, protecting the public
www.optical.org

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