

# bulletin

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## CET deadline: five months to go

There are now just five months to go until the end of the current CET cycle. On 31 December 2009, all fully-qualified practitioners will need to have earned their minimum points requirement - 36 general points for non-specialist practitioners - to remain on the GOC registers from next year.

According to the latest figures, CET activity is gathering pace. So far, just over half of all registrants have gained the 36 points minimum requirement. The majority of optometrists - 56 per cent - have already earned 36 points or more. Contact lens opticians are close behind, with 54 per cent having already earned 36 general points. Dispensing opticians have the most ground to make up: out of 4,162 dispensing opticians, 35 per cent have already hit the 36-points mark. Of those remaining, 1,252 have currently gained between 25-35.5 points.

Registrants with a registered specialty are also acquiring points at an impressive rate. Of the 1,248 contact lens specialists, 57 per cent have already earned 18 specialist points



**"The remaining five months will go incredibly quickly, so those who have failed to make a start will be struggling unless they make some headway now."**

→ continues on page 2



## Students face late renewal penalty

**Students who have not yet renewed their GOC registration for 2009-10 face a £10 late fee penalty. As *Bulletin* went to press, 2,340 applications were still outstanding. Those who missed the 15 July deadline must now pay the extra charge on top of their £20 fee.**

Students who do not renew by 1 September face removal from the registers. Those who wish to continue with their course will have to pay a £40 restoration fee. Maintaining GOC registration for the full duration of the course is a legal requirement for optometry and dispensing optics students. Those who are not registered may be excluded from clinical training and examinations.

Those who apply for retention now but decide not to continue with their course will receive a full refund. Pre-registration students who renew now, but join the full register by 31 August will have their full registration fee reduced by £20.

For an application form contact the registration team on 020 7580 3898 (option 1), or download a copy from [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org)

### In this issue

All change for retention 2010

Revalidation proposals prompt debate

Meet the 12 new Council members

Patient perspective: improving accessibility

## CET deadline: five months to go

or over – the minimum requirement. Optometrists with a therapeutic prescribing specialty are also displaying the same enthusiasm and commitment. In total, 42 per cent have already reached the 18-point mark. To date, 38 per cent have earned between seven and 17.5 points. These practitioners will need to maintain a steady pace until the end of the year if they are to retain their specialty registration.

### Top of the tables

The race to gain the highest number of CET points shows no sign of abating. The most points earned by an individual registrant has jumped from 350.5 (as reported in February 2009) to a staggering 501.

*Bulletin* also reported in February that nine per cent of registrants were still stuck at zero points. This figure has now fallen to five per cent, with 834 practitioners who are still not out of the CET starting blocks.

Linda Kennaugh, GOC head of education, commented: "The deadline for this CET cycle is now imminent and overall, registrants' progress is encouraging. However, the remaining five months will go incredibly quickly, so those who have failed



to make a start will be struggling unless they make some headway now.

"The CET requirements cannot be ignored," she adds. "If you have failed to earn your points by 31 December, you risk being removed from the registers – so the consequences are serious."

### "The most popular method of learning is text-based distance learning, such as journal articles."

#### Hot topics: competencies and their uptake

The top three most popular competencies are ocular abnormalities; contact lenses; and optical appliances. Throughout this CET cycle, ocular abnormalities has consistently scored highly in the popularity stakes. In total, 461,767 points have been awarded in this topic - almost double the number awarded in contact lenses, which is the second most popular competency overall. The provision for contact lens CET is also high, with over 2,000 events approved to date. This indicates that CET providers are catering to the current demand for education in this area. The least popular competency is low vision, where just 9,689 points have been awarded.

#### Ways of learning

Overall, the most popular method of learning is text-based distance learning, such as journal articles. Just over 60 per cent of all CET points awarded were gained in this way. By contrast, just seven per cent of all CET offered is in this format. Statistics also show that registrants are still favouring traditional learning methods. Over a quarter of all points awarded so far have been gained in lectures.

### Message from the Editor

There has never been a more important time to get involved in the GOC policies that affect you. And with three major consultations currently open, there are plenty of opportunities to have your say.

The GOC is currently asking for feedback on an issue close to every practitioner's heart: registration fees. Turn to page three to find out how next year's fee structure might change and how you can respond to the consultation.

In April, the 12 new members of Council took up office, and this issue they step up to take the *Bulletin Questionnaire*. Members are currently asking for your input to help formulate the Council's strategy for 2010–2015. Find out more on page five.

We also report on the latest developments around revalidation. The open consultation on draft proposals for the scheme closes in September, and your suggestions have been coming in thick and fast – turn to page 11 to see what's been said so far.

Elsewhere, we look at how CET activity is gathering pace ahead of this cycle's deadline. We also talk to one d/Deaf patient about how accessibility and communications support for d/Deaf people could be improved in optical practices.

As ever, we always want to hear your suggestions for improving *Bulletin*. Send your ideas and feedback to me at, [bulletin@optical.org](mailto:bulletin@optical.org)

Have a great summer, and enjoy this issue.

Clare Millington, Editor

## Message from the registrar



Dian Taylor

**I've been involved in optics for 21 years now, but I'm still a 'lay' person who is reminded daily of the hugely important role optometrists and dispensing opticians play in maximising the quality of life of the UK public.**

One such occasion was at the recent Vision 2020 conference. It was inspiring to hear about so many initiatives led by optical professionals and others to tackle sight loss and provide help and hope to those who experience it.

The day brought together a diverse range of individuals and organisations, each with their own particular aims and outlook. Vision 2020's great success is in uniting these many groups through admirable clarity of purpose. Its goals are to prevent avoidable blindness, and to improve outcomes for people with visual impairments. These are goals on which all its members can agree and more importantly, get on with doing something about.

As the GOC begins developing our five year strategy, there are lessons we can learn from Vision 2020. Our strategic direction needs to facilitate cooperation to meet our goals, and keep us focused on improving outcomes for patients and the public. In this spirit, we are drawing on existing expertise and knowledge across the sector, and inviting stakeholder groups to share their ideas with us. It has been a rewarding exercise.

Our real challenge is to sustain this kind of engagement across all areas of our work. The Council agreed a Consultation Framework in March, which set out the GOC's commitment to deliver meaningful involvement in our policy and decision-making. The results are already in evidence. This issue of *Bulletin* alone includes reports on current or recent consultations on the Codes of Conduct, the planned revalidation scheme, a Welsh Language Scheme, and the structure of registration fees.

There will be more to come. I invite you all to play your part in helping us get it right.

Dian Taylor

# All change for retention 2010

From 2010 the retention process is changing. *Bulletin* looks at what lies ahead, and how you can get involved.

## Renewing registration online

The GOC is hoping to give registrants the opportunity to renew their registration for 2010-11 online. The new system is planned to launch in January 2010, and is designed to make the retention process simpler and more efficient. Benefits should include:

- Savings on printing and postage
- Less paperwork for registrants
- Minimal processing delays, and fewer problems caused by postal failures.

Development is underway, and registrants will be kept up to date in the coming months.

## Have your say on registration fees

This summer, the GOC launches its consultation on possible changes to the registration fee structure.

In response to calls from practitioners and optical bodies, the Council is seeking views on proposals for differential fees for specific registrants. Possible changes could include: a lower retention fee for dispensing opticians relative to optometrists, or a reduced fee for those on a low income.

The GOC is also exploring a range of other registration fee proposals, including staged payments and additional charges for paper registration, non-EEA student registration, and specialty registrations.

To ensure any changes are as fair as possible, the Council is urging all affected parties to have their say. To read the proposals and respond online, visit [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org)

## Update your email address

All registrants are being urged to provide the GOC registration team with an up to date email address, to avoid missing out on essential information updates, electronic publications and news alerts.

Kate Fielding, director of communications and information commented: "We're using more electronic communications to ensure that printing and postage costs are kept to a minimum – costs that are passed onto registrants in the annual retention fee. The GOC is working hard to cut costs wherever we can – it's important that registrants play their part in this initiative."

To update your email address, go to [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org) and log into the registrants' area. Or call the registration team on 020 7580 3898 (option 1).

**"The GOC is working hard to cut costs wherever we can – it's important that registrants play their part in this initiative."**



## Patients warned: 'Don't cut corners on contact lens care during recession'

**The British Contact Lens Association (BCLA) and the GOC are urging Britain's 3.5 million contact lens wearers not to endanger their eye health through risky contact lens practices, for the sake of cutting costs.**

The warning follows a YouGov poll revealing that nearly four in ten contact lens wearers would consider switching their contact lens brand to save money, and more than one in ten wearers would consider having less frequent check-ups. One in five would consider wearing their reusable lenses for longer than recommended to cut costs.

Consumers are also being warned of the dangers involved in other examples of high-risk contact lens practices such as:

- Wearing a damaged or torn lens instead of replacing it
- Cutting down on lens cleaning to save on solutions costs
- Switching to solutions that may not be compatible with the eye or lens
- Sleeping in lenses not suitable for overnight wear to avoid buying solutions.

The BCLA and GOC have produced a patient information leaflet 'Buying Contact Lenses', to encourage safe practice among consumers. The leaflet and further advice are available from [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org) or [www.bcla.org.uk](http://www.bcla.org.uk)



# Equal services for all

As part of a consultation on the proposed new Codes of Conduct, the GOC heard from a number of d/Deaf patients about their experiences of opticians, and the help available to aid communication.

One patient, Merfyn Williams, told *Bulletin*: “My biggest frustration has been poor communication starting with making appointments via telephone. I use Text Direct but many staff don’t know what this service is. You can find out at [www.typetalk.org](http://www.typetalk.org)

## “There is still a low level of compliance in meeting our communication needs.”

“The optometrist’s consulting room can be a nightmare for d/Deaf people. The sight test is often carried out too fast and the room is too dark to lip-read. d/Deaf people need time and space to communicate properly.

“There should also be a working loop for hearing aids and space for a sign language interpreter.

“To date, I feel there is still a low level of compliance in meeting our communication needs. Assertive users have to resort to challenging the providers to commit to communication support.”

Under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), disabled people must have equal access to services, goods and facilities. This means, for example, that a d/Deaf person attending an eye test appointment is entitled to, and will require, communication support during their consultation.

*Merfyn Williams is a Camden LINK representative and a d/Deaf user.*

### Case study – communication support in Camden

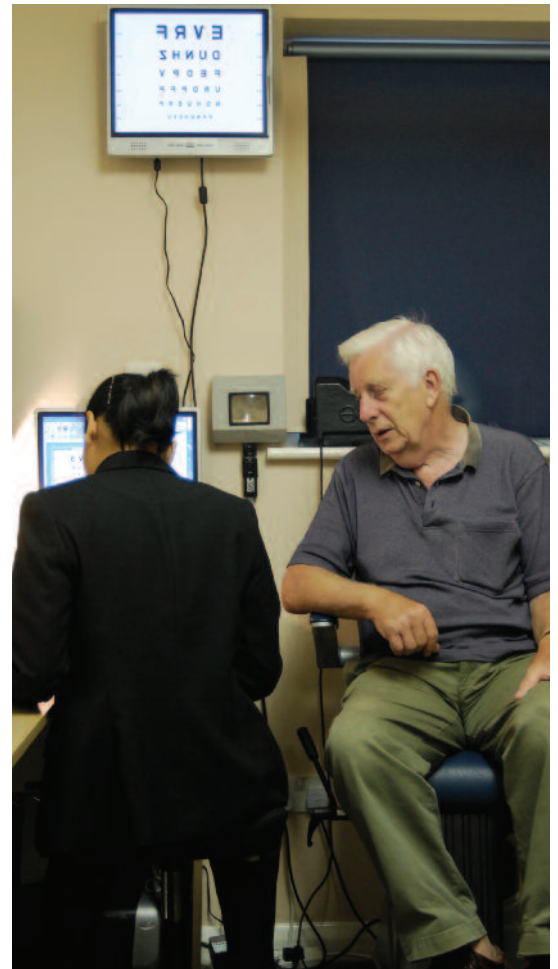
Camden PCT fund a contract with the Royal Association for Deaf people (RAD) to provide communication support to d/Deaf people who use services such as GPs, dentists and opticians.

When a d/Deaf person needs an eye examination it is the optician’s responsibility to ensure this support is provided.

They must find out what communication support is needed and arrange it with RAD. This could be:

- British Sign Language/English Interpreting
- Hands on Signing
- Lipspeakers
- Notetakers
- Speech to text reporters
- Deaf Blind Manual

Camden PCT and RAD are working together to provide quality communication support services for d/Deaf people. Wherever your practice is based, make sure you know what arrangements are in place for providing communication support to d/Deaf people who book appointments with you.



### d/Deaf – what’s the difference?

The word ‘deaf’ is the generic term for all levels of hearing loss, from a mild to profound loss. When written with a capital ‘D’ (Deaf) it becomes a cultural representation for Deaf people whose first or preferred language is Sign Language. d/Deaf people have differing communication support needs, and it is important that they have access to the appropriate Language Service Professional (LSP) for their own requirements. This may be a British Sign Language (BSL) / English Interpreter, a lipspeaker, a notetaker or a speech to text reporter.

## GOC meets the public

“These events are a great opportunity for the GOC to talk to patients and raise awareness.”

This year, the GOC will attend two conferences as part of its campaign to raise public awareness of the Council’s role, and to highlight the fact that optometrists and dispensing opticians are registered healthcare professionals.

In June, the Council attended the **Trading Standards Institute (TSI)** conference in Brighton, a consumer affairs event. And in September, the GOC heads north to York, to exhibit at the **Citizens Advice Conference**. GOC representatives will promote the Council’s work to an audience of advice bodies, bureau managers, regulators and the public.

Kate Fielding, GOC director of communications and information, said: “These events are a great opportunity for the GOC to talk to patients and raise awareness of the fact that optometrists and dispensing opticians are registered professionals. It’s important that patients have this assurance – and in turn, registrants will also benefit from greater public confidence in the eyecare they provide.”

Later this year, the GOC will launch two new public information leaflets: *Who we are and what we do* and *How to complain about an optician*. Both will be available from [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org)

# Bulletin profile: Geoff Harris, GOC chair

In April, the newly-formed Council took up office following government reforms. The Council has reduced from 28 to 12 members, all of whom are independently appointed by the Appointments Commission. *Bulletin* meets the new members and looks at some of the challenges ahead.

**Geoff Harris was appointed as chair of the General Optical Council (GOC) in January 2009, having served as a Council member for four years and deputy chair for two years.**

"By joining the GOC, I wanted to be part of ensuring that the public can have confidence in the quality and safety of eyecare services. When you visit your High Street optician, you assume that the practitioner treating you is properly trained, and capable of delivering the best possible care. As a patient it's generally an unconscious process. Quality healthcare regulation ultimately underpins quality healthcare delivery, and it's rewarding to be part of that chain."

Geoff brings a wealth of experience to the Council. Originally trained as a medical scientist and with a doctorate in immunology, he spent ten years working in the Foreign Office, and is currently also Chair of the South Central strategic health authority – a position which brings him into contact with health policy makers at the highest levels. He acknowledges that it is critical for the GOC to engage effectively with Government and legislative change affecting the eyecare professions.

"Standards in healthcare regulation remain high on the Government agenda, so it's vital that the GOC is able to influence policy development. The views of registrants, patients and the public must get the attention they deserve from the outset."



Since January, Geoff has steered the Council through a demanding period of transition – a challenge he has embraced. "There is a very real and rewarding sense of achievement in affecting change. During my time with the Foreign Office I was responsible for developing recommendations for Ministers on UK policy on a range of international issues where UK interests were involved, notably in relation to oil and to developments in the Middle East. Seeing my recommendations being adopted and implemented as part of government policy was very significant for me personally, to know that my work was making a difference. Importantly, these experiences have taught me that nothing is as it seems. In all spheres of life there is always more to things than first meets the eye."

**"Standards in healthcare regulation remain high on the Government agenda, so it's vital that the GOC is able to influence policy development."**

Looking to the future, the Council is currently setting the strategy, and considering work priorities, for 2010 – 2015. Geoff explains: "There are a number of critical issues now facing the professions. The current business model in optics depends upon commercial success, so what role could the GOC play in strengthening the value of registrants' training and clinical competence? How do we ensure that every person in the eyecare pathway is delivering care to the highest standards and to the greatest value? Overall, it will be important to make eyecare a higher priority in national health policy. So many people have said to me, 'my sight matters much more than anything else', yet somehow it doesn't get the same attention as other health issues.

"On a practical level, we are developing online retention. The Opticians Registers are at the heart of what we do as a regulator. Implementing a new retention system is an opportunity to put registrants more in control of their registration. And of course, revalidation is also in the pipeline for all healthcare professionals. We need to make sure the scheme for optometrists and dispensing opticians is proportionate and enforceable.

"The GOC is at the forefront of optical regulation, both in Europe and internationally. We need to focus our resources so that our leadership position delivers value to registrants, and benefits the health of the UK public. Preparing for the future whilst achieving in the present – this is our main challenge. I'm committed to getting that balance right."

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## GOC consults on five-year strategy

**The GOC is currently consulting on its strategy for 2010-15. Registrants and the public are encouraged to have their say on the GOC's role and work priorities for the next five years.**

The Council is inviting feedback on issues including its role in relation to patients, how it should work with other organisations to protect the public, and how to support registrants who raise concerns.

GOC chair, Geoff Harris said: "Now that the newly-formed Council has taken up office, we are taking the first steps

towards setting our agenda for the next five years. To help us achieve this, we are encouraging registrants, patients and the public, and optical bodies to get involved."

The GOC will use the responses to formulate a draft five-year strategy on which it will consult in November. The final strategy launches in April 2010.

Download the consultation document and respond online at [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org), or contact Naomi Ford on 020 7307 3468 to request a paper copy.

# Who's who on Council?

The new members of Council take the *Bulletin Questionnaire*.



Name: **Morag Alexander**

Background: **Founding convener of the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC); Director for Scotland of the Equal Opportunities Commission**

Lives in: **Edinburgh**

Why did you want to be a Council member?

**As the first convener of the new SSSC, I became convinced of the value of proportionate regulation, not just for the status and professionalism of registrants, but most importantly for the protection of the public. Following this role, I was keen to develop and expand my understanding of professional regulation and make a contribution in another area.**

What has been the most rewarding moment in your career so far?

**The years of campaigning and lobbying with colleagues for a Scottish Parliament, which was established in 1999. Equality of opportunity is one of its four founding principles.**

Who would you invite to your dream dinner party?

**John Adams, the second president of the United States and his wife, Abigail. They were decent, hard-working and highly principled, and fiercely opposed to slavery. It would be fascinating to learn about their 18th century life in revolutionary America.**



Name: **Anna Bradley**

Background: **Lay member**

Lives in: **Colchester**

Why did you want to be a Council member?

**For years I lobbied for changes to professional regulation. Now those changes have come about, it is a privilege and a personal challenge to help make them work excellently.**

What has been the most rewarding moment in your career so far?

**Combining a successful full-time professional career with having a lovely family.**

What would you like to see the GOC achieve in the next five years?

**High confidence ratings from the public, professionals and the CHRE.**

What was your childhood ambition?

**To be a gymnast or failing that, to change the world – a bit.**



Name: **Paul Carroll**

Background: **Optometrist**

Lives in: **Forton, Lancashire**

What is the most important issue facing optics at the moment?

**The impact of funding cuts in primary care and its potential consequence for the current models of NHS eyecare delivery – we must not allow the nation's eye health to become the victim.**

What would you like to see the GOC achieve in the next five years?

**To become the exemplar regulator against which all others are measured.**

What was your childhood ambition?

**To one day be able to play jazz piano as well as Art Tatum.**

Who would you invite to your dream dinner party?

**All the owners of the Montrachet vineyard in Beaune – and ask them each to bring a bottle...**



Name: **Brian Coulter**

Background: **Retired chief executive, former specialist ombudsman, Director of Social Services**

Lives in: **Lisburn, Co Antrim, Northern Ireland**

Why did you want to be a Council member?

**To contribute to professional regulation, and in doing so play a small part in upholding and developing services to patients.**

What has been the most rewarding moment in your career so far?

**Working to integrate social care, social housing funding, and services for older people has been hugely rewarding.**

What would you like to see the GOC achieve in the next five years?

**I hope the GOC will help the optical professions to maintain and improve upon that much-prized, but increasingly elusive goal of public trust.**

Who would you invite to your dream dinner party?

**Nelson Mandela. Mandela famously said, "It always seems impossible until it's done". In the recent history of my beloved homeland (Northern Ireland) such sentiments have a strong resonance.**



Name: **Peter Douglas**

Background: **Chartered accountant; various non-exec and advisory roles in private and public entities, including NHS East Sussex Downs and Weald.**

Lives in: **London**

What is the biggest challenge for GOC at the moment?

**To effectively regulate optical practitioners; ensure the safety and wellbeing of the public; and to ensure the public are aware of the GOC's work - and its benefits.**

What is the most important issue facing optics at the moment?

**Optics is already under recognised and underfunded within the NHS, and the UK's financial problems will make that worse. Eye health is an important gift that we, and**

**the Government take for granted, leave too much to the private sector, and in doing so put a great strain on the good will and social conscience of opticians, and ophthalmologists, and the disadvantaged within society. Trying to influence these areas is a major challenge for all concerned in optics.**

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

**The harder I work, the luckier I get.**



Name: **James Hanfield Russell**

Background: **Contact lens and dispensing optician; lecturer and examiner in dispensing optics and contact lenses; Healthcare Commission Associate; past president of ABDO**

Lives in: **Canterbury**

What is the biggest challenge for the GOC at the moment?

**Getting the balance of regulation correct in the post-Shipman environment.**

What has been the most rewarding moment in your career so far?

**Addressing 120 newly-qualified opticians and their proud parents from the Archbishop's podium in Canterbury Cathedral, at ABDO's diploma ceremony.**

What is the most important issue facing optics at the moment?

**Communicating to the Government and the public, the real value and importance of the clinical skills our patients receive and deserve in the delivery of eyecare.**

What was your childhood ambition?

**To be a steam engine driver on the locomotive 'Mallard', running between York and Darlington.**

Who would you invite to your dream dinner party?

**Dylan Thomas, Clive James, Tom Waites, Charles Dickens and the muppets (it goes without saying that my wife would be there too!).**



Name: **Rob Hogan**

Background: **Optometrist**

Lives in: **Kegworth, Leicestershire**

What is the most important issue facing optics at the moment?

**Believing in our own potential, being confident in our abilities and striving to be sufficiently entrepreneurial to make it happen in the face of adversity.**

What would you like to see the GOC achieve in the next five years?

**To regain the trust of the profession by taking decisive and effective action against clear transgression, whilst highlighting the excellent record we have in preserving the UK's vision.**

What was your childhood ambition?

**To be a goalkeeper for Everton and England.**

Who would you invite to your dream dinner party?

**Barak Obama, Oscar Wilde, John Lennon and John Fowles; along with my immediate family, and my paternal grandfather who I never had the chance of meeting.**



Name: **Liam Kite**

Background: **Dispensing optician; senior lecturer in optometry and ophthalmic dispensing**

Lives in: **Sleaford**

What is the biggest challenge for the GOC at the moment?

**Formulating a strategic five-year plan that incorporates CHRE recommendations whilst ensuring that stakeholders continue to receive the highest standards of commitment and forward thinking from the Council.**

Why did you want to be a Council member?

**It's a very exciting time in optics with new core competencies and big challenges at every corner. To be involved in taking the profession forward is an honour, and an opportunity too great to pass up.**

What is the most important issue facing optics at the moment?

**Maintaining an individual identity and not being swallowed by the bigger fish in the healthcare professions.**

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

**To be fair, open minded and always try to appreciate both sides of an argument.**



Name: **Kevin Lewis**  
 Background: **Optometrist**  
 Lives in: **Basildon, Essex**

What is the biggest challenge for the GOC at the moment?  
**To convince registrants and professional bodies that the new constitution of Council will lead to better governance.**

Why did you want to be a Council member?  
**To assist in shaping the GOC to be an effective, well-run regulator. As a registrant, I feel it's important that registrants' 'tax money' is well spent on protecting the public.**

What would you like to see the GOC achieve in the next five years?  
**To implement a fair and fit-for-purpose revalidation scheme.**

What was your childhood ambition?  
**To become an astronaut - I was brought up in the 'space race'.**



Name: **Fiona Peel**  
 Background:  
**Nurse; non-exec in NHS Wales; LLM in legal aspects of medical practice**  
 Lives in: **Cardiff**

Why did you want to be a Council member?  
**It's an interesting intellectual and communications challenge to put the value and purpose of healthcare regulation into the public consciousness. It's usually only considered after something has gone wrong. In a world of devolved governments and a global economy, there is a strong need for professional standards, so it's important that all parts of the UK are heard - I enjoy speaking on behalf of Wales.**

What has been the most rewarding moment in your career so far?  
**During my time as a nurse I sat with a patient who said she was afraid of dying, was all alone and asked would I stay with her until the end. I did, and its meaning has expanded and influenced my life.**

What would you like to see the GOC achieve in the next five years?  
**A strong reputation for influencing professional standards and accountability; to be regarded as the most effective regulator.**



Name: **Nicholas Rumney**  
 Background: **Optometrist/educator**  
 Lives in:  
**Black Country by birth, Hereford by adoption, education in Cardiff and Melbourne**

What is the biggest challenge for the GOC at the moment?  
**Establishing the credibility of a fully-appointed Council amongst stakeholders in a world where the credibility of those in Government who insisted on change is at an all time low.**

What has been the most rewarding moment in your career so far?  
**1 Being behind therapeutic prescribing becoming a reality.  
 2 Showing my late father the two *Optician* awards won by my practice in 2008.  
 3 Being appointed to the GOC by the Privy Council.**

What would you like to see the GOC achieve in the next five years?  
**Implement a credible system of revalidation, which is aspirational, practical and accessible, yet robust and not threatening. To ensure revalidation is established with full and appropriate financial support from Government.**

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?  
**Play the long game.**

**Come and see us at a Council meeting! This year's meetings take place on the following dates:**

**Wednesday 23 September 2009**  
 Time: 09:30  
 Venue: to be confirmed

**Wednesday 18 November 2009**  
 Time: 11.00  
 Venue: to be confirmed

Papers and agendas are usually published on our website, [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org), the week before the meeting takes place. For more information and to register your interest in attending, email [mclaridge@optical.org](mailto:mclaridge@optical.org)

# FTP hearing “highlights importance of student supervision”

The GOC is reminding all optical businesses, students and supervisors to ensure their current arrangements for supervision of students meet the requirements outlined by the Council, and examination or assessment bodies.

**This follows the recent Fitness to Practise (FTP) hearing involving three registrants: Boots Opticians Ltd, a GOC-registered business; Trevor Burgess, a registered student dispensing optician; and Richard Simmons, a registered dispensing optician.**

On 26 June, an independent FTP Committee determined that Boots Opticians Ltd had failed to take reasonable and proportionate steps to prevent Trevor Burgess from dispensing spectacles to a patient under the age of 16. The Committee found that the fitness to practise of Boots Opticians Ltd was impaired, and imposed a fine of £30,000. Trevor Burgess was given a formal warning, to expire after three years. No sanction was imposed on Richard Simmons.

**“With appropriate supervision, students can develop the core competencies they need to practise safely, in a controlled, restricted environment.”**

GOC chief executive and registrar, Dian Taylor commented: “Supervision of students is essential for protecting patients and the public. This case highlights the importance of having proper supervision mechanisms in place, and ensuring those mechanisms are communicated to staff, and implemented at ground level.”

Dian Taylor added: “With appropriate supervision, students can develop the core competencies they need to practise safely, in a controlled, restricted environment. But without it, students may not know their limits, and the consequences can be potentially harmful to patients.”

‘Supervision’ means that the supervisor must be on the same premises as the student they are supervising, and in a position to intervene at any time. During the hearing the FTP Committee noted that these were just the minimum requirements for supervision.

By law, student registrants of both optometry and dispensing optics, must not carry out any of the following unless supervised by a GOC-registered professional:

- Testing sight
- Fitting contact lenses
- Dispensing to children under 16, or to the visually impaired

The GOC requires the examination and assessment bodies to have in place systems for the approval and review of supervisors, and also the suitability of the practice and placements. There are currently three examination and assessment bodies: the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO); the College of Optometrists; and the University of Manchester.

Supervisors must have full, up-to-date registration with the GOC or GMC held for at least two years. Previous registration as a student does not count as eligibility to supervise.

Full details of this and other hearings, are available from [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org)



## Where can I find out more about supervision?

Both ABDO, and the College of Optometrists publish detailed guidance on supervision. Visit [www.abdo.org.uk](http://www.abdo.org.uk) and [www.college-optometrists.org](http://www.college-optometrists.org)

Business registrants are bound by the Code of Conduct for business registrants. Individual practitioners, including students, are bound by the Code of Conduct for individual registrants. Both are available from [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org)

# Changes coming for Codes of Conduct

The Codes of Conduct for individual and business registrants are changing. *Grahame Tinsley*, Assistant Director of Standards, reviews the latest developments.



**“The GOC received positive feedback from the event with the vast majority of delegates finding it ‘useful’ or ‘very useful’.”**

For a more detailed report on feedback from the event, visit [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org)

**Following a four-month consultation with stakeholders, the GOC looks set to make changes to the new Codes of Conduct it proposed in January. The consultation attracted an impressive response rate – one of the highest ever – and the GOC is now using this feedback to further amend the new Codes.**

Council will meet in November to approve the final proposals, and it is likely that the new Codes will be launched to registrants, optical bodies, patients and the public, from April 2010.

Jon Levett, GOC director of standards, said: “The consultation has played an integral part in ensuring that the new Codes are fit for purpose. We’ve given careful consideration to all the consultation responses. The feedback from registrants, optical bodies, patients and the public, has been really insightful. That feedback will now shape the changes we make to the Code – some of those changes will be fairly significant.”

## Consultation

The GOC reviews the Codes of Conduct each year, and in 2008 a working group met to look at feedback, and to consider how other regulatory bodies had developed their Codes. The group also considered the standards set by the CHRE and recent changes in government legislation.

In January 2009, Council launched a consultation on the proposed changes. In total, 14 changes to the Codes were suggested. Nine related to the Code for individual registrants covering the following areas:

- Clarifying the purpose of the Codes
- Students and trainee registrants
- Insurance
- Providing information about fitness to practise concerns
- Personal conduct
- Promotional activity
- Patient consent
- Equality and diversity
- Acting within one’s professional competence.

The five changes proposed to the Code for business registrants included:

- Clarifying the purpose of the Code

- Clinical governance
- Providing information about fitness to practise concerns
- Financial and commercial dealings
- Promotional activity.

## Discussion event

In April, key stakeholder groups gathered at a discussion event to consider the following issues:

- Should an optometrist be obliged to report concerns about their own or a colleague’s fitness to practise?
- What kinds of behaviour, whilst practising or not, should put a person’s registration at risk?
- Are there any particular issues for registrants or patients because of their gender, race, age, disability, religion, belief, or sexual orientation?
- How can the Codes be better promoted so that patients and the public know what standards to expect from their optician?

## Your feedback

At the discussion event, groups looked at two case studies relating to whistleblowing: one concerning personal conduct and the other clinical decision-making.

In both cases, groups felt these issues could be dealt with by the registrant’s employer and that involving the GOC should be a last resort.

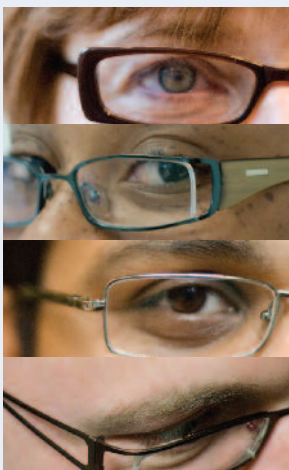
Next, delegates looked at four case studies concerning behaviour that might place a person’s registration at risk: accessing pornography at work; a female registrant who had been convicted of domestic abuse against her husband; fraudulent claims for replacement spectacles; and clinical competence concerns.

When considering equality and diversity in the Codes, useful points were made about the difficulties people have when seeing an optician – whether through language barriers, age or disability. (See our feature on page 4 for an in-depth look at this issue.)

Finally delegates looked at some ways in which the Codes could be better promoted to the public.

The GOC received positive feedback from the event, with the vast majority of delegates finding it ‘useful’ or ‘very useful’.

# Good response to equality monitoring



**Nearly 70 per cent of registrants responded to the GOC’s new equality and diversity monitoring process. In an overwhelmingly positive response, 12,157 out of 17,626 registrants returned their monitoring forms.**

The equality and diversity monitoring forms were included in this year’s retention packs, and were sent out to all fully-registered optometrists and dispensing opticians. The requested information includes: ethnicity; age; gender and any disabilities.

Dian Taylor, chief executive and registrar, said: “We are delighted by the response, particularly as this is the first year of the monitoring process. Getting monitoring right is a crucial part of ensuring that our work is free from discrimination.”

The results illustrate the diversity of those working in the optical professions. Key findings include:

- 57 per cent of respondents were female;
- The majority (59 per cent) were aged between 25 and 44 years old;

- The largest ethnic grouping was White British, at 69 per cent. The next largest group was Indian, at 15 per cent, and the Total Asian category comprised over 20 per cent of respondents;
- 140 registered opticians and dispensing opticians (one per cent of respondents) reported having a disability.

Dian Taylor said: “The information we receive through equality and diversity monitoring will over time help us to identify any unintended barriers that exist for people of a particular age, race or gender or who have a disability. We can take action to remove those barriers.

“It is important that we work towards a full response rate, so that we can be certain that our data is a complete picture of the optical professions and that particular groups are not being left out. In the future we will be encouraging our remaining and new registrants to submit forms, so we can ensure that our information is robust and comprehensive.”

# Revalidation: time is running out to have your say



- What evidence could be used to demonstrate professional competence?  
Following on from the successful Codes of Conduct discussion event (see page 10), the GOC will hold a series of further discussion events on revalidation. Events will take place around the country and will give all stakeholders, including registrants, the opportunity to discuss the proposals in detail and to raise any concerns they have.

Under the GOC's initial proposals, practising registrants will need to gain a 'licence to practise' – a concept also included in the General Medical Council's scheme. Registrants would be revalidated against entry-level competencies and revalidation would have varying levels according to the risk involved in the registrant's scope of practice. Therefore in order to gain their licence, registrants involved in higher-risk work would have to provide more robust evidence to prove that the competencies had been met.

Revalidation will take place every six years (once every two CET cycles). It is anticipated that revalidation will begin with the 2012 -14 CET cycle.

All healthcare regulators are introducing revalidation in response to the Government's 2007 White Paper, *Trust, Assurance and Safety*.

The closing date for responses is 25 September 2009. To respond to the consultation, and to find out more, visit [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org)

**"Revalidation would have varying levels according to the risk involved in the registrant's scope of practice."**

**The GOC's first consultation on its draft proposals for revalidation has been running since March, and the Council has already received a high volume of feedback from registrants. The first stage of the consultation process ends in September - so time is running out if you want to get your voice heard.**

Once introduced, the revalidation scheme will allow optometrists and dispensing opticians to demonstrate, at regular intervals, that they have the up-to-date skills, knowledge and competencies to practise.

All suggestions and feedback from the consultation will help to formulate more detailed proposals, which will then be the subject of a second consultation later this year.

Jon Levett, GOC director of standards, said: "Revalidation will be a significant change for the professions, so we have to make sure we get the scheme right. We will be working closely with registrants, the optical bodies and the public as the plans take shape. This is an ideal opportunity to tell us what you think – either by responding to the consultation in writing, or by coming along to one of our discussion events later in the year." Issues for consideration include:

- Should all registrants be revalidated?
- How often should someone be revalidated?

## What you have told us so far:

**"All professional people owe it to the public to keep up to date and safe."**

**"By the number of complaints to the number of eye exams/dispensings per year it would seem that most practitioners do keep up to date."**

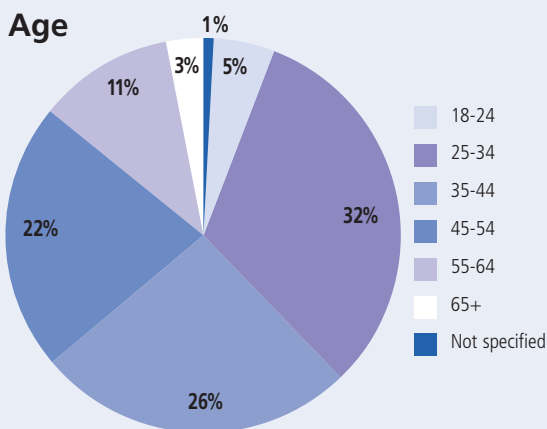
**"I support having levels of assurance to match levels of risk."**

**"Optometrists and dispensing opticians must have differing levels for revalidation."**

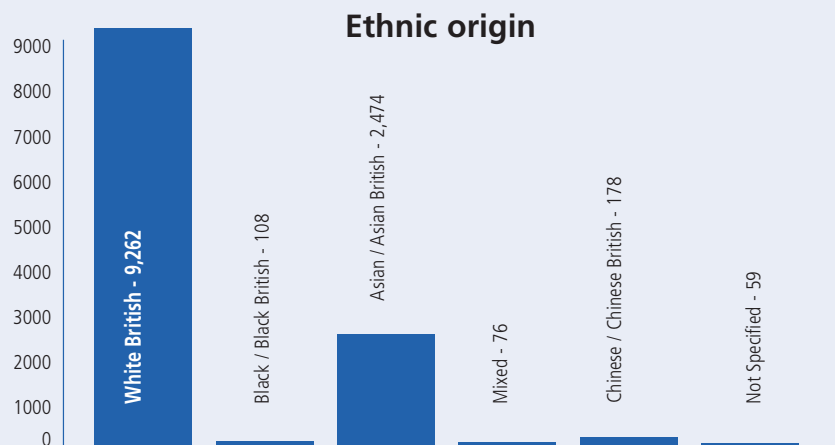
**"Presently, I feel that CET is sufficient."**

## Coming soon....

This Autumn the GOC will be holding a series of discussion events about revalidation. The events will be held throughout the UK, and dates will be published as soon as they become available. To register your interest in advance, email [sgrier@optical.org](mailto:sgrier@optical.org)



Age breakdown of registrants who have responded to date



Ethnic origin of registrants who have responded to date

# Recession calls for clear communication

The Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS) continues to field a wide range of complaints from patients. But in the current economic climate, certain issues are becoming more prevalent. *Richard Wilshin*, OCCS Administrator explains.

**“As with other complaints, communication is key to resolving and preventing something developing into a full-blown complaint.”**

**Complaints about spectacles which have been prescribed at one practice but dispensed elsewhere are still common. The growth in internet shopping, coupled with a natural inclination to save money in these recessionary times, means that problems arising from this purchasing trend are likely to increase.**

Purchasing online has become a fact of life and optics is no exception. However, a key step in buying spectacles remotely is that the online supplier usually asks for the PD measurement to be supplied by the customer.

The OCCS has had numerous complaints from patients who are confused and often annoyed that their practitioner will not release this information which they need to be able to purchase online. “I know my optician took this measurement, but they didn’t put it on the prescription and when I asked for it they refused to give it to me. Shouldn’t I be able to have this information under the Freedom of Information Act?”

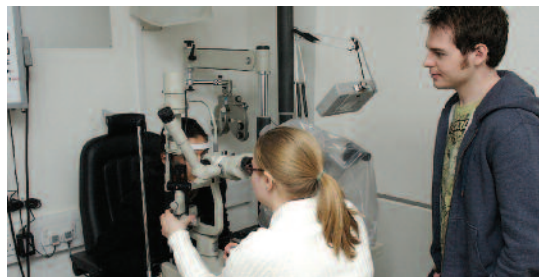
In fact the PD measurement does not form a statutory part of the sight test. It’s part of the dispensing process - but customers often view this as a ‘ploy’ which prevents them buying freely.

As with other complaints, communication is key to resolving and preventing something developing into a full-blown complaint. Once customers understand that the PD measurement is part of the dispensing process, they’re less likely to complain when they don’t have it.

Clear understanding about this issue will definitely help minimise complaints.



## Changes to trainee assessment



**The GOC has approved changes proposed by the College of Optometrists to its trainee assessment scheme ('Scheme for Registration') for optometrists. The changes are in response to feedback from assessors, examiners, supervisors and trainees.**

For trainees beginning the scheme this year, their work-based assessment will now be split into two stages. During the first stage, trainees will undergo four visits by assessors who will test 75 competencies in total. The first visit takes place a month into training. The second stage is designed to test over-arching competencies, and routine and contact lens assessment. It will be conducted by a second assessor, towards the end of the work placement, just before the final OSCE assessment.

Until 2005 trainees had to pass a ten-point final examination in order to enter the GOC register as a fully-qualified optometrist.

In 2005 the College introduced the Scheme in which trainees were continuously assessed. They introduced quarterly work-based assessments, with a four-part final assessment under examination conditions.

For more information on the Scheme, see [www.college-optometrists.org](http://www.college-optometrists.org)

## GOC consults on Welsh Language Scheme

**The GOC is currently consulting on its proposed Welsh Language Scheme. The consultation launched in June and runs until 11 September. Like all public bodies, the GOC is required under the Welsh Language Act to prepare a Welsh Language Scheme.**

However, Kate Fielding, GOC director of communications and information, says the scheme is about more than just fulfilling a legal duty:

“Bilingual provision plays a crucial role in enabling the Council to deliver high-quality services to the Welsh-speaking public. Our Welsh Language Scheme needs to be fit for purpose, and we’re asking for stakeholder input to help us achieve this.”

Under the proposals, the GOC intends to treat Welsh and English equally when providing services in Wales. Steps the Council will take include making the patient areas of its website available in Welsh, producing a Welsh version of its Annual Report, and offering Fitness to Practise witnesses the chance to address hearings in Welsh.

The Council is encouraging all stakeholders to offer their views on how the scheme can be improved. Respond to the consultation at [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org). For more information or for a paper copy, contact Naomi Ford on 020 7307 3468.

### Got a view?

Have your say by emailing us at [bulletin@optical.org](mailto:bulletin@optical.org) or writing to:

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