

GOC 'not ruling out' a licence to practise

By Clare March

The GOC has announced that it is not yet ruling out the introduction of a licence to practise, as part of the revalidation scheme for optometrists and dispensing opticians. Revalidation is on track to be introduced for individual GOC-registered practitioners in January 2013.

The announcement follows a three-month consultation which considered three options for how the GOC might take forward revalidation, taking into account the different roles of dispensing opticians and optometrists in optical practice, academia, management and research. The options up for debate were that: only practitioners active in clinical practice are revalidated; all practitioners are revalidated; or, all practitioners are revalidated but to different degrees, depending on the scope of practice and risk involved.

Throughout the consultation, the GOC took in the views and suggestions of registrants, patients and the public, employers, and other partner organisations, as to whether the licence to practise should be used to distinguish between those registrants who have been revalidated, and those who have not.

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Student retention: time is running out

The GOC is warning all student optometrists and dispensing opticians who have not yet renewed their GOC registration for 2010-11, that they must act now or face removal from the student registers on 1 September.

The deadline for student retention is **15 July 2010**. Those who have not returned their completed form and payment by this date, but who get their application in by **31 August**, will have to pay a £10 late fee penalty on top of the £20 retention fee. Students who do not renew by **1 September** face removal from the registers.

GOC chief executive and registrar, Dian Taylor said: "For optometry and dispensing optics students, it is a legal requirement to maintain your GOC registration throughout your training. Those who fail to apply for annual retention by the deadline risk being removed from the registers. This means you may be excluded from clinical training and examinations – and putting your career at risk. All students must renew their registration now, before it's too late."

Those who apply for retention now but do not continue with

their course will receive a full refund. Pre-registration students who renew now, but join the full registers 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



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GOC 'not ruling out' a licence to practise

As *Bulletin* went to press, Council had just met at its June meeting in Birmingham to consider the outcome of the consultation. Following the consultation, initial proposals were compiled by a dedicated GOC 'revalidation working group'. The proposals acknowledged that the arguments were finely balanced between the three options. In weighing up the evidence so far, Council were conscious of the need for further research to help identify the number of registrants who would not be required to have a licence to practise should this model prove to be the most favourable. Council also considered the argument that even those in purely managerial or administrative roles should still take steps to make sure that they were up-to-date with clinical practice at the threshold level required for registration. In addition, the GOC noted concerns that the licence to practise model could potentially introduce further complexity to the regulatory regime which might confuse patients, the public, and employers.

"Keeping our options open at this stage allows us to build a revalidation scheme that works for all practitioners but is still sufficiently robust and proportionate to accommodate the variation that exists amongst the professions."

In light of these debates, Council agreed to continue exploring options for introducing the licence to practise for those who are active in clinical practice – but nothing has yet been set in stone.

Jon Levett explained: "Full details of revalidation requirements and how those requirements will affect practitioners, are still to be developed, so we need to exercise caution in agreeing one approach over another. So that we have a clear picture of exactly how revalidation - and possibly the licence to practise – might be applied, we will continue to identify and research how different groups can

be revalidated proportionately, according to their scope of practice and the risks involved."

He added: "Keeping our options open at this stage allows us to build a revalidation scheme that works for all practitioners, but is still sufficiently robust and proportionate to accommodate the variation that exists amongst the professions."

Further proposals for the revalidation scheme, and the licence to practise, will be available in September 2010.



For full details of the licence to practise consultation, see page 6.

Message from the Editor

Welcome to the summer issue of *Bulletin*. This issue we've been working right up to the wire so that we can bring you the very latest news and developments.

There are so many opportunities for you to get involved with the GOC's work, such a wealth of new projects and initiatives, and so many people with interesting perspectives to share, that it has been a real job to fit everything in – but we have succeeded!

CET and revalidation are high on the agenda this issue. Now the GOC has agreed to continue exploring the licence to practise as part of a revalidation scheme – see our lead story – turn to page 6 for a closer look at the background to the announcement. Then on page 7, find out how CET will form part of revalidation post-2012.

On page 9, you can also get the lowdown on making the most of your GOC registration with the help of the new online 'toolkit'. And we hear from a dispensing optician about what registration means to them, and the benefits of being able to promote that to patients.

As always, it's great to hear from readers so feel free to get in touch at bulletin@optical.org

Clare March Editor



Dian Taylor

Message from the Registrar

Much of the last few years have been spent laying the foundations for a new Council and a modernised GOC that is robust enough to deliver public protection that both patients and the optical professions can have faith in.

As I write this, with our feet firmly in 2010, what strikes me

is how rewarding it is to finally see that hard work and preparation come into fruition. In April, the Council's 2010-15 strategy came into effect. This outlines an ambitious workplan set against three key priorities, and work has already begun on a whole tranche of exciting new initiatives - as you'll see on page 5. However, as we have all seen over the last five years, there has been immense change, not just within optics but within a wider social, political and regulatory context. The greatest challenge for any organisation is to ensure that its work responds to, and allows itself to be influenced by, these changes. This 'horizon scanning' will play an integral role in delivering Council's strategy going forward, in the public interest.

As we transfer our strategic priorities from ideas set out on paper to 'real life', at the heart of our work is the importance of

collaborating and engaging with patients and the public, optometrists, dispensing opticians, and all our other stakeholder partners. Effective regulation cannot happen without understanding the experiences and views of those who are most

"However, as we have all seen over the last five years, there has been immense change, not just within optics but within a wider social, political and regulatory context"

affected by our work. For me, this is what makes eyecare regulation such a fascinating and rewarding sector in which to work. To help us achieve this, the last phase of the GOC's stakeholder engagement strategy is underway, to establish two new Stakeholder Reference Groups. Details can be found on page 8, and these groups will be another vital string to the GOC's bow when gathering first-hand feedback and experiences from the professions and members of the public 'on the ground'. Their contribution will be invaluable in ensuring we deliver meaningful policies and effective decision-making.

Dian Taylor

Retention removals 2010-11 decrease

At the end of the last full retention process, the number of registrants removed from the GOC registers for failing to renew fell by just over one per cent, when compared to the previous year.

In total, 86 optometrists, 123 dispensing opticians and 49 business registrants were removed from the registers from 1 April.

In addition, 191 registrants were removed for failing to meet the minimum Continuing Education and Training (CET) requirements by the end of the 2007-9 cycle. This represents a decrease of 128 registrants, when compared to the end of the first cycle in 2006.

Tracking your retention online

This was the first retention cycle in which registrants were able

to track the progress of their retention online, through the new registrants area of the GOC website. Practitioners were able to check that their form had been received, get confirmation when their payment was processed, and download a receipt once their application was successfully completed – a facility taken up by over 5,500 registrants.

GOC assistant director of registration, Philip Hallam, assured registrants that further improvements are still to come: "In response to feedback from registrants, we are working hard to expand the registrants area so that we can eventually offer practitioners a full online retention system. It's important that we develop our existing online facilities where appropriate to make life easier, and more efficient for our registrants – which will also result in significant long-term cost savings."

Vetting and Barring Scheme halted

In its recent document *'The Coalition: Our programme for government'*, the Government set out its aim to 'review the criminal records and vetting and barring regime and scale it back to common sense levels'.

In order to deliver this promise, on 15 June the Home Office announced that the Vetting and Barring Scheme (VBS) will be halted. Under the proposed Scheme, voluntary registration with the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) for new employees and job movers working or volunteering with children and vulnerable adults was due to start on 26 July. Following this, registration would have been compulsory for new entrants to the workforce and job movers from November 2010.

The recent announcement means that registrants should continue to fulfil the GOC registration requirements as usual, and employers should continue to carry out appropriate pre-recruitment checks, including CRB checks where appropriate or required by law.

The scope of the remodelling process – to be co-ordinated by the Home Office in partnership with Department of Health and Department for Education – is currently being finalised and will be announced shortly.



The following existing arrangements under the Scheme will continue:

- The Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) will continue to maintain two constantly updated lists, one for those barred from working with children, the other for those barred from working with vulnerable adults.
- Existing requirements concerning Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and Access Northern Ireland checks will remain in place, and those entitled to such checks can continue to apply for them.
- Employers and other organisations including healthcare regulators are still legally obliged to refer information to the ISA if they have moved or removed an individual because they have harmed, or there is a risk of harm, to a member of a vulnerable group.

For more information:

www.isa-gov.org.uk

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/media-centre/press-releases/Vetting-barring-scheme

Geoff Harris stands down as GOC Chair

Last month, the GOC announced Geoff Harris's resignation from his position on Council. Geoff was Council Chair.

The Health and Social Care Committee of the Appointments Commission confirmed that Anna Bradley, a lay member of Council, will act as the interim Chair, until 30 December, or until a permanent replacement for the role is appointed (if this is earlier).

On his departure, Geoff said: "The past six years I've spent with the GOC have been both challenging and rewarding, as fundamental reforms in both optics and regulation have been implemented. During that time, it has been a real privilege to be part of such a forward-thinking organisation that has always had

public protection at its very core."

Dian Taylor, GOC chief executive and registrar paid tribute to Geoff's achievements: "It is with deep sadness that we say farewell to Geoff, whose intelligent leadership and sound judgement have played an integral role in steering the Council to where we are today."

Newly-appointed interim Chair, Anna Bradley, said: "I am honoured to have been given the opportunity to lead the GOC over the next few months, through to the appointment of a permanent Council Chair. I look forward to working with staff and fellow members as we begin to take forward an exciting programme of work for 2010-15."



GOC asks, 'What FTP information should be available on the registers?'

The GOC is currently asking for views on how information about the fitness to practise of GOC registrants should be made available, and how the registers can be developed to enhance public protection. Registrants, members of the public and other stakeholders are all encouraged to participate in the consultation, which runs until the end of August.

Changes being considered include whether additional fitness to practise information should be made available directly on the GOC registers, for example decisions for suspension or erasure, warnings imposed, and information on past sanctions that are no longer in force.

This information is currently only accessible from the decisions and transcripts from FTP hearings, which are published separately on the hearings section of www.optical.org. As part of the consultation, the Council is also considering changes to the way these decisions and transcripts are available.

Assistant director of registration, Philip Hallam commented: "This consultation reflects suggestions from the public and other key stakeholders for improvements to our current policies, which we have received as part of our continuing work to develop and

enhance the content of the Opticians Registers. The aim of any changes would be to provide enhanced protection for the public, by improving the accessibility of information about the fitness to practise of health professionals."

Any changes to current policies will be agreed at the 23 September meeting of Council, with implementation planned throughout 2011.

A detailed consultation document for written submissions is available from www.optical.org, together with an online survey to help gather feedback on how the registers are currently being used, and to identify where improvements might be needed. The GOC is also working closely with stakeholder groups to discuss these issues. For further details, visit the consultation section of www.optical.org

First ever GOC report on equality and diversity published

Increasing numbers of women and those of Asian ethnic origin are entering the optical professions, according to the GOC's first ever equality and diversity report.

The report was published in February 2010, and the data was collected from equality and diversity monitoring forms included in the 2009-10 retention packs sent to all full registrants and students.

The monitoring information covers ethnicity, age, gender and disability. Nearly 70 per cent of full registrants responded. In addition, 1,162 of 4,512 student registrants also volunteered information.

Matthew Tait, GOC registration policy and projects manager, leads the monitoring project: "We've received an excellent response to this first annual round of monitoring, which gives us

reasonable confidence in the data. Getting monitoring right will provide valuable information about trends in the optical professions, and plays a crucial role in ensuring that our work is free from discrimination.

"Over time the monitoring will help us identify any unintended barriers that might exist in the optical professions. It can also highlight areas where more public information or professional training might be required."

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Other findings from the report include that there are a higher proportion of female dispensing opticians than optometrists, and that optometrists are significantly younger on average than dispensing opticians. The report also includes some preliminary analysis of data for registrants who were the subject of a fitness to practise complaint.

This year, the GOC will be resending monitoring forms to all registrants who have not yet responded, and to all new registrants. For the future, there are plans to collect a broader range of data, including sexual orientation, gender identity, religion and political beliefs. This will reflect the requirements of the new public sector equality duty, set out in the Equality Act 2010.

The full 2009 equality and diversity monitoring report is available to download from, www.optical.org



Setting priorities for the next five years

In April, the GOC's strategy for 2010-15 came into effect. The strategy sets out three overarching work priorities for the next five years:

1. Develop the regulatory framework to support UK eye health in delivering safe, high-quality care which meets society's needs and expectations.
2. Continue to modernise the GOC's core functions and put in place systems for improvement to become more efficient and more effective.
3. Promote a wider understanding of the GOC's role and engage stakeholders (including the public, patients, registrants, educators and their representatives) in its work.

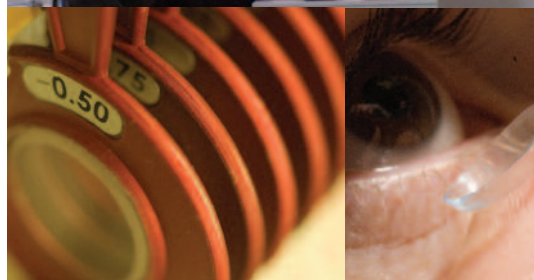
Work has already begun on a number of projects and policies that will help to support, and take forward these priorities:

Reviewing the qualification framework for dispensing opticians

As Linda Kenneough, GOC director of education, explains: "We want to ensure the current framework for dispensing training in the UK and Europe remains fit for purpose both now and in the future, while continuing to ensure public protection. We're looking to establish a vision for the direction of dispensing training by engaging with the profession and training providers."

Online retention

During the 2010-11 retention period, registrants were able to log in to the improved registrants' area of the GOC website to check that forms had been received, payments were received and processed, and to download receipts. "We've laid the foundations for the new, and much-improved registrants area, and the online retention-tracker facility has been well received", said Philip Hallam, GOC assistant director of registration. "The existing retention services for practitioners are continually evolving, as work starts on new developments for the 2011-12 retention cycle. This will help to provide a more efficient renewal service for registrants."



Promoting understanding of standards and guidance

To coincide with the launch of the new Codes of Conduct, the GOC is putting together a patient-focused leaflet, 'What to expect from your optician'. The new publication explains to patients what they can expect in terms of care and standards when they visit their optician. Clare March, acting head of communications, said: "Throughout our consultation with patients and members of the public, this is something that patients have told us they would appreciate. We plan to launch the leaflet at the Citizens Advice Conference in September."

GOC publishes new Investigation Committee guidance

Following a consultation last year, the GOC has published new guidance for members of the Investigation Committee to use when making decisions about a registrant's fitness to practise.

When the GOC receives a complaint about a registrant, the complaint is first considered by its Investigation Committee (IC). The Committee decides whether the allegation should be referred to the Fitness to Practise Committee, and if not, what the outcome

should be. The Committee may instruct the fitness to practise team to undertake further investigation before the Committee reaches its decision, including requesting a health assessment or a performance assessment, or gathering further evidence.

The guidance came into effect on 1 June 2010, and is intended to encourage consistent decision-making by the IC. GOC director of legal and fitness to practise, Rosalyn Hayles, told *Bulletin*: "Every decision that the Investigation Committee makes will be based upon the facts of the case being considered. The guidance will help the Committee to make sure that all decisions are fair and consistent."

The GOC made a number of changes to the guidance following consultation with stakeholder groups. The Council received responses from major stakeholders, including the optical bodies, multiples and fellow regulators.

GOC acting head of communications, Clare March said: "This is another example of the GOC working with partner organisations to benefit registrants and the public alike. We're grateful to everyone who took the time to consider the draft guidance and suggested ways of improving it. Stakeholder input into crucial areas of our work such as this has huge benefits for those who are most affected by our policies and decision-making."

The guidance is available from www.optical.org
See page 11 for more information on the newly-recruited members of the GOC committees.

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Revalidation and a licence to practise

As *Bulletin* went to press, the GOC announced that it will continue to explore options for introducing the 'licence to practise' as part of revalidation. The decision follows a three-month consultation on whether a licence to practise should be introduced. *Grahame Tinsley*, Assistant Director of Standards explains the options.

“This is your revalidation scheme, and to make it work we need to consider all perspectives, relevant issues, concerns and ideas.”



The background

The GOC's initial consultation on revalidation issued in March 2009, outlined our views on what a revalidation scheme for dispensing opticians and optometrists might look like. A full copy of the GOC's initial consultation on revalidation can be found at: www.optical.org/goc/filemanager/root/site_assets/consultation_documents/goc_initial_consultation_on_revalidation.pdf

What are the options for licence to practise?

A dedicated consultation focused on whether a licence to practise should be used as part of the scheme for optometrists and dispensing opticians. The deadline for responses was 4 June.

The consultation asked registrants, patients, and all other stakeholders for their views on the following:

- Who should be revalidated?
- Should the licence to practise be introduced or not?; and
- If the licence to practise is introduced, for whom should it apply?

A licence to practise could be introduced as a way of distinguishing between practitioners who have been revalidated, and those who have not. This would mean that registrants who are not active in

clinical practice - and therefore not treating patients - such as lecturers, business owners and those in managerial positions or on a career break, would not need to undergo revalidation until they re-enter clinical practice.

The consultation included questions on the arguments for and against a licence to practise and presented three options:

Option 1: Only those who are active in clinical practice are revalidated

Option 2: All registrants are revalidated

Option 3: All registrants are revalidated but to different degrees

The arguments for and against

In total, 97 consultation responses were received from a mix of registrants, the optical bodies, regulators, academic institutions, patients and the public. Those responses were considered by the GOC's revalidation workstream.

In May, the GOC also hosted a seminar to discuss the various options. Both patient representatives and registrants attended. The GOC's deputy registrar and director of standards, Jon Levett delivered an introduction to revalidation, stressing the importance of the GOC's public protection role and emphasised that the scheme must be proportionate to the risks involved.



Presentations for and against the licence to practise then followed, delivered by members of the GOC's revalidation workstream. Claire Slade, ASDA Professional Services Manager, presented the argument for the licence to practise.

She argued that if all registrants are required to revalidate then registrants who are not currently clinically active, such as lecturers, business owners and those in managerial positions may suddenly be required to examine patients without up to date skills or the appropriate experience, 'which could result in possibly dangerous situations for patients'.

David Pyle, a lay member of the workstream presented the case against, and argued that the public assumes that all optometrists and dispensing opticians are on the registers and are therefore already 'licensed to practise'. It was also suggested that 'it would be confusing to have a register within a register, which may result in a lack of trust from the public'. Following this argument, 'everyone should revalidate as it would provide clarity and confidence for the public'.

Both presenters agreed that whatever decision is taken, the outcome needs to be communicated effectively, easy to understand and implement, whilst ensuring there is no confusion for registrants or the public.



A CET scheme for 2012 and beyond



With revalidation for optometrists and dispensing opticians now on the horizon, the current CET scheme is changing so that it will form the basis of revalidation. GOC Director of Education, *Linda Kennaugh*, explains how your feedback is helping to shape those plans.

The consultation

This spring, the GOC held a CET stakeholder event to listen to views on how the existing CET scheme can be enhanced to be used as the basis for revalidation. An online feedback survey was also launched, to help the GOC understand practitioners' specific experiences of the scheme. The event, held in London, was well attended by registrants and other stakeholders. In addition, almost 1,000 registrants completed the CET survey online.

Delegates primarily considered the need to introduce more specific CET requirements, including:

- The type of CET activities undertaken
- The range of competency areas
- A mechanism to ensure that CET is completed throughout the cycle
- The requirement that all of the points required cannot be gained in a short period at the beginning or end of each cycle.

The last CET cycle: what can we learn?

With fewer than 200 registrants having been removed from the registers for failure to complete their CET for the 2007-9 cycle, the existing scheme has been successful in ensuring registrants are keeping their knowledge and skills up to date. However, if CET is to be used as the foundation for revalidation it will need to focus on areas of risk and scope of practice.

Practitioners at the event were surprised to learn that 60 per cent of registrants obtained all of their CET points in the last cycle purely from article-based distance learning. A significant number gained all their CET points in the last six months of the cycle, rather than taking part regularly throughout the three years. Although nearly 70 per cent of the CET available was via lectures, only 27 per cent of all CET points awarded were gained this way. Other face-to-face modalities were very rarely attended.

It is also clear there is a shortfall in participation in some areas, particularly in communications skills, and that some competencies, such as ocular abnormalities, are much better covered than others, both in terms of CET availability and points achieved.

What you told us

Participants in the survey and delegates who attended the stakeholder event highlighted barriers and a reluctance to choose

certain types of CET, such as peer review. Those barriers included the restrictive nature of the approval criteria, lack of availability in some geographical areas and anxiety around the implications of peer review. The GOC will be considering how these issues can be addressed as part of its proposals for the future scheme.

Feedback also indicates overall support for maintaining a three-year CET cycle, but registrants accepted the need to ensure that 100 per cent of CET points are not gained in a very short period at the beginning or end of the cycle, with no activity for the remainder of the three years.

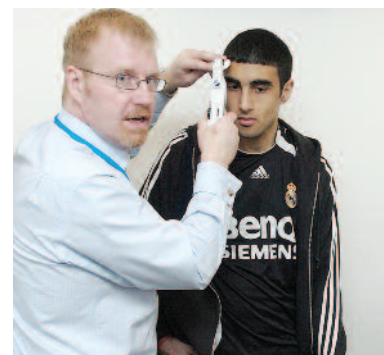
The responses also revealed there is a misunderstanding among many registrants that the GOC has discretionary powers to deal with cases of exceptional circumstances such as serious illness, maternity or career breaks. This is not the case – under the current system there is no way we can deal with registrants who can demonstrate genuine reasons for having not met their CET requirements, any differently to those without a good reason. Practitioners expressed overwhelming support for the GOC to have such powers, and we are now exploring options for how this could be accommodated in the scheme post-2012.

Where does CET go from here?

So that the scheme is suitable as the foundation for revalidation, more specific requirements need to be developed. It is expected that registrants will be required to undertake a variety of CET. This will cover both a range of learning methods, including some interaction with peers; and CET that is linked to scope of practice and areas of risk that will be identified as part of the risk profiling research we have commissioned.

It is also proposed that a wider scale of CET points be introduced so the number of points available better reflects the nature of the activity. For example, interactive, peer review or clinical skills CET would carry a higher points value than distance-learning articles and attending lectures.

The changes being considered will be introduced for the next CET cycle in 2013. We are now developing proposals in light of these findings. These proposals will feed into the wider revalidation project, including the recent outcome of the licence to practise consultation. For regular updates on the progress of the revalidation and CET projects visit www.optical.org



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Guide Dogs transforming lives

Tony Burrow, Senior Project Manager for Guide Dogs, reports for *Bulletin*.

Guide Dogs is a registered charity providing guide dogs, mobility and other rehabilitation services that meet the needs of blind and partially-sighted people.

There are currently around 4,700 working guide dogs in the UK, providing their visually-impaired owners with a life-transforming level of independence, freedom of mobility and confidence.

If you, a colleague or a patient would like further information about how guide dogs can transform lives, contact Guide Dogs:
tel: **0845 372 7499**
email: **guidedogs@guidedogs.org.uk**
or visit **www.guidedogs.org.uk/enquiries**

Annie Gay is a guide dog owner who has macular degeneration.



"My guide dog Amba has changed my life. A guide dog can offer a unique, safe and effective way of getting about independently. You don't need to have lost all your sight and most people who own a guide dog still have some vision. Many aren't formally registered as blind or partially-sighted, either."

Guide Dogs advises that there's no upper age limit – anyone can apply for a guide dog, and many people over 70 have become successful guide dog owners. Despite the training costs, it costs just 50p to have a guide dog, with all essential equipment and training provided by The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, including vet's bills and dog food if people wish.

"Before my first guide dog, the biggest challenge was how I would cope walking down a crowded street. Now I stride around confidently, Amba

loyally by my side, transforming my confidence and independence. The change in my self belief has been phenomenal. After learning to navigate my local town centre in Bedworth (near Leamington Spa), I've quickly grown more adventurous and even travel the country by train and plane on my own now. Well, I say on my own.... Amba is always with me of course!

"My independence wouldn't have been possible without my trusty four-legged companion, and the staff and volunteers at Guide Dogs who made our training possible. "I encourage anyone with sight loss to contact Guide Dogs, and explore the best way of meeting your specific mobility needs. There's nothing to lose and potentially much to gain by considering all the options."

GOC pilots stakeholder reference groups



From September, two new groups of volunteers will begin offering advice and suggestions on GOC projects and policies.

The 'Stakeholder Reference Groups' (SRGs) are being set up to offer the optical professions, and patients and members of the public, another avenue through which they can influence the GOC's work. It is anticipated that both groups will be formed by 12 volunteers: members of the optical professions will make up one group, with 'lay' people – those who do not have an optical background – comprising the other.

Volunteers will mainly be required to participate from home, through online e-engagement exercises. There will however be face-to-face discussions or focus groups on certain topics from time to time.

The groups will have the opportunity to contribute to the GOC's work in a variety of ways, such as:

- Providing feedback on information leaflets for either patients or registrants;
- Testing the usability of sections of the website;
- Suggestions for improving consultation questions; and
- Offering opinions on GOC policies, such as revalidation.

Clare March, acting head of communications was positive about the benefit the SRGs would have on the Council's work:

"This is an exciting initiative for the GOC, and the first of its kind. The response we've had to this campaign from both the public and optical professionals has been encouraging. Once the SRGs are established, the perspectives and experiences of our volunteers will be vital in helping us to ensure that our work has the interests

of the public at its core, but also that our policies and communications are transparent, proportionate and workable for all those who are affected by them."

A launch meeting on 22 September will give SRG volunteers the chance to meet GOC staff and Council members and learn about the organisation.

Establishing two SRGs forms the final phase of the Council's stakeholder engagement strategy, available from **www.optical.org**. The groups will run initially as a pilot scheme, with a review after 12 months.



Making the most of your GOC registration: your guide to the online toolkit

The GOC has launched its first ever online registration toolkit to help optometrists and dispensing opticians promote their registration to patients and the public. *Clare March*, GOC acting head of communications, explains.

Why introduce a registration toolkit?

The toolkit has been launched in response to feedback from practitioners, who have frequently asked the GOC to provide practical tools to help them promote and highlight their registered status, competence and skill. Patients have indicated that they are often unsure of who they are dealing with in their optician's practice. In particular, feedback has demonstrated that patients would like to see greater visibility of registered titles and GOC registration numbers, for example on name badges and name plates in consulting rooms.

Dian Taylor, GOC chief executive and registrar explains: "When patients don't know who is treating them, or what that person is qualified to do, this can potentially become a public protection issue as patients are not able to make informed choices about who they consult about their eye health. For example, a parent may unwittingly seek advice on their child's eyecare from someone who is unqualified to offer that advice."

What's included in the toolkit?

The toolkit offers practical advice and best practice guidance on how to promote your registration. The main element is the GOC-registered logo, which is available for all full registrants to download from the password-protected Registrants area of the GOC website, www.optical.org (follow the link from the homepage). The logo automatically includes your unique GOC registration number, to guard against misuse – the logo should never be used without a valid GOC registration number.

To accompany the logo there is a leaflet, 'Making the most of your registration' which explains why the logo is available, how to use it, and for those who would prefer not to use a logo, offers other practical ways of highlighting your status as a registered eyecare professional. This is available to download from the Registrants area.

Using your GOC-registered logo

The GOC has put together some simple design guidelines to help you use the logo correctly. You must always check the guidelines before using the logo on your promotional materials.

You can use the logo on:

- Printed and electronic stationery: letterheads, business cards, appointment cards and email signatures
- Practice/ individual websites
- Other promotional literature such as magazines and information leaflets
- Within your practice, consulting room or waiting area, for example on a window sticker.

If you wish to use the logo in any other way (for example, conference stands, television, other promotional products) you must always check with the GOC first.

Information for patients

The online toolkit will be coupled with information targeted at patients and members of the public. This will explain the importance of GOC registration, what to expect when they see the GOC registered logo, how to check the free online registers, and how to

complain about a registrant in the rare event that something does go wrong. Information will be distributed to a range of public information services, including Citizens Advice, NHS PCTs, Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS), and other patient information and support organisations.

What are the benefits for registrants?

GOC registration confers legal privileges, allowing registered practitioners to carry out restricted functions. It is important that you can be identified as a GOC registrant so that both patients and professional colleagues understand your scope of practice. For patients, knowing that their optometrist or dispensing optician is registered with the GOC means that they will have increased reassurance and confidence in your professional skills and expertise. It means you will benefit from enhanced public confidence, as patients will be encouraged to only rely on a GOC-registered practitioner for their eye health. Dian Taylor concludes: "GOC registrants do a fantastic job, delivering eyecare to thousands of patients every year. We want the public to benefit from that reassurance also."

"GOC registration confers legal privileges, allowing registered practitioners to carry out restricted functions. It is important that you can be identified as a GOC registrant so that both patients and professional colleagues understand your scope of practice."

The logo can be downloaded in the following four formats:

Website version

You can use this version if you have a practice/individual website. For example, you may wish to use this on your website homepage, demonstrating to people visiting your site that you are a GOC registered eyecare professional, and/or a GOC-registered business. You can also use this version in emails, as part of your electronic signature.

Letterhead version

You can use this version on your printed letterheads and other official stationery such as prescription cards. It is an appropriate size to fit into most letterhead document templates, without detracting from your own individual branding. If you produce your own stationery, you can insert the file into most file formats, for example Microsoft Word 2003 and 2007, and Office for Mac. If you have a designer who produces your stationery, they can use this logo to suit your requirements.

Business cards version

You can use this version on your printed business cards and other similar-sized official stationery.

Appointment cards version

You can use this version on your printed appointment cards and other similar-sized official stationery.



Practitioner perspective

Dominic Candon FBDO is a contact lens optician and practice director of Specsavers in Gravesend.



“These days, the public are bombarded by an ever-increasing range of choice in the products and services they look for.

This can become confusing and all of us will at times face difficulty working out which is the best option to go for. As diverse a range of activities as writing a will, selling a house, or provision of certain health therapies may all be offered by unregistered, unregulated

“I have always found that patients want to know that they are dealing with an expert and being able to describe myself as a registered optician provides them with that assurance. For me, registration has also brought many opportunities in that it has allowed me to go on to open my own practice.”

individuals – yet thankfully, there are properly registered and regulated providers that we as consumers can choose to use. The primary reason for professional registration is protection of the public and consequently the public have greater confidence in those health professionals who are registered. It is partly for this reason that the Department of Health published a report last year regarding the extension of professional regulation to other, currently unregistered, health professional groups. It is understandable

why more than two dozen of these groups aspire to (and are actively seeking) registration status, as it is through registration that they will be able to assure the public that they are safe and competent to practise.

Like all my professional colleagues, I am proud that I am a UK registered dispensing optician. With this registration comes the recognition that I practise to an internationally-renowned professional standard. In using the title that I worked hard to achieve, I am recognised as being part of a professional community, committed to upholding the highest standards. And we have all experienced the practical advantages that this brings. It is not simply a matter of being able to point to a certificate on a wall, but the ability to demonstrate to the public, to our peers, employers and other health professionals that we have reached and maintain a recognised standard of practice.

Particularly when it comes to the everyday activities of dispensing modern lenses, or problem solving, or dispensing to children – even managing the first-time presbyope, I have always found that patients want to know that they are dealing with an expert and being able to describe myself as a registered optician provides them with that assurance. For me, registration has also brought many opportunities in that it has allowed me to go on to open my own practice, to engage in more specialised practice and to supervise the work of others, including trainee dispensing opticians and trainee optometrists. In our increasingly complex and changing world, the public will continue to seek the reassurance of dealing with a registered professional for those services that matter.”

Consumer complaints: to buy or not to buy?

The Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS) often receives complaints from patients who feel they have been ‘pressured’ into buying unneeded spectacles. *Richard Wilshin*, OCCS Administrator examines the issues.

Case study

“Recently, a patient who had previously worn only readers complained to the OCCS that she had felt pressured into buying varifocals, even though she maintained her long vision was good, and she regularly used her readers quite comfortably. Based on ‘the professional advice given’ she ordered varifocals. However, in the first week of wearing them she experienced dizziness, blurred peripheral and intermediate vision - with no noticeable improvement in her reading vision.

On taking our initial advice, she returned to her optician to explain the matter. The patient was told that she could exchange the varifocals for two single vision pairs but would not receive a refund. As the varifocals had cost more than the price of two single vision pairs, the patient felt strongly that she had been ‘conned’ into spending considerable sums of money.”

Complaint resolution

There are several issues at play:

The patient’s belief that he/she is being given professional advice that should be taken. This highlights the responsibility of the optician to be open about any detected changes in vision, all the dispensing options that are available, and transparency about cost.

The patient was not freely given a copy of her prescription until she pressed for it on her return visit. This she took to be indicative of the optician ‘having something to hide’. The prescription should,



of course, have been given immediately following completion of the sight test.

This case also demonstrates the importance of clear communication in respect of varifocals exchange or intolerance policy. The patient had no prior knowledge of what would happen if she did not get on with the varifocals. As with most of the complaints OCCS receives, clear communication may have prevented the issue developing into a complaint for both patient and practice.

In focus: new GOC committee members

New members have now been appointed to each of the Council's four statutory committees. *Bulletin* finds out more about the people - and expertise - that help to make those committees work.

The Registration Committee advises the Council on registration issues, including the rules governing registration and publication of the registers.

Michelle Derbyshire, a dispensing optician, explains why she applied to be a committee member:

"As Head of ABDO College Distance Learning Institute my role includes responsibility for all the elements of students' admissions, registry and enrolment. Since the introduction of the student registers we have been proactive in ensuring our students are registered, and that they understand the impact of this professional status on their studies, their working lives and their careers. We have approximately 450 students on the GOC student registers at any one time.

"I saw this as an opportunity to provide a voice for dispensing opticians, optical education and student registrants, but also to represent to our students the work of the GOC and illustrate the multi-faceted dimensions of a future as a qualified dispensing optician."



"I have always had a strong personal sense of commitment to patients, the professions caring for them and the wider public as they interact with healthcare. Contributing to the Standards Committee's debates and thus to the wider GOC Council is a welcome and exciting opportunity."

The Standards Committee advises and gives assistance to the Council on the standards of conduct and performance expected of current and potential registrants.

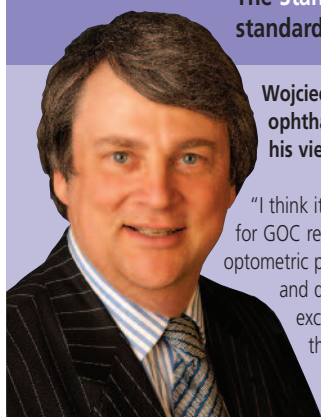
Wojciech Karwatowski, an ophthalmologist, gives us his views:

"I think it's a particularly exciting time for GOC registrants. The scope of optometric practice is expanding and developing which is excellent, but I am sure it will throw up significant issues around ensuring appropriate

standards so that the public has confidence and faith in the profession.

"Having an ophthalmologist contribute to the Standards Committee is a farsighted decision. I hope my presence will bring some knowledge and understanding of the interface between the two professions and how it affects individual patients.

"I have always had a strong personal sense of commitment to patients, the professions caring for them and the wider public as they interact with healthcare. Contributing to the Standards Committee's debates and thus to the wider GOC is a welcome and exciting opportunity."



The Education Committee advises the Council and other committees on optical training, education and assessment. This includes the approval of training establishments and qualifications. It reviews the requirements for the content and standard of education, including the CET scheme, and recommends changes as necessary.

Brendan Barrett is an optometrist, lecturer and researcher. He tells us why his recent experience as a student will inform his role on the Committee:

"I've just completed a BSc in Psychology with the Open University. Most of this was taken by distance learning which presents particular challenges, but also many opportunities. The GOC also validates courses that are offered via distance learning and I think I can contribute from my experience of this kind of teaching delivery and because my experience of being a student is very fresh!

"I can see many challenges ahead for the GOC in general, including its Education Committee. I hope that my experiences in UK higher education as a teacher and assessor will prove useful in negotiating these challenges."



The Investigation Committee decides whether an allegation against an individual or business registrant should be referred to the Fitness to Practise Committee, and if not, what the next course of action should be.

James Kellock is the lay Chair of the Committee:

"As a barrister, I understand what it's like to work in a regulated profession. I believe it's all about how people conduct their daily business, and that's what attracted me to the Investigation Committee. Any profession can become

inward-looking so having lay people involved is very healthy. It helps us to get a rounded picture before coming to a decision.

"I'm conscious of the pressures and uncertainties, and at the end of the day it's unfair to both registrants and complainants if they're left hanging. I want us to ensure that cases are dealt with as quickly as possible."



GOC praised for 'commitment to quality and fairness' in investigating fitness to practise complaints

Registrants survey

The 2010 registrants survey is now live, and the GOC is inviting your feedback and comments on issues such as the retention process and GOC publications, including *Bulletin*.

To complete the survey, follow the link from the homepage of www.optical.org. The survey launched in April's issue of *eBulletin*, the GOC's twice-yearly e-zine. If you're not receiving *eBulletin*, contact the registration department on 020 7580 3898 (option 1) or email goc@optical.org to make sure your email address is up-to-date.

If you would prefer a paper copy of the survey, contact Simon Grier on 020 7307 3478.

The GOC received praise from the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence (CHRE) in March, for the way it handles its investigation of complaints about registrants' fitness to practise.

The CHRE is the independent body that oversees the work of all the UK healthcare regulators. Throughout 2009, it carried out audits of all the healthcare regulators' fitness to practise investigation processes.

In its audit of the Council's processes the CHRE concludes that the optical regulator 'deals with fitness to practise cases well', and that it 'demonstrates a commitment to quality and fairness, and to protecting the public', also observing that cases are dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner. The CHRE report highlights key areas of good practice, including:

- When closing a case, the Investigation Committee (IC) offers advice to individual and business registrants on how to improve the service they give, including how to handle complaints in a better way.
- IC members are active in identifying good practice points to share with the rest of the profession, for instance through the College of Optometrists.
- GOC staff offer complainants helpful information about the extent of the GOC's powers and about other potential sources of help.

The report also commends the GOC for taking prompt action to review and improve its processes following the identification of two areas of potential risk during CHRE's audit.

GOC registrar and chief executive, Dian Taylor, commented: "We welcome the positive outcome of the CHRE's audit. The findings will help demonstrate to the public, patients and GOC registrants that they can have confidence in the GOC's FTP processes, and that decisions are fair, transparent, and stand up to independent scrutiny. We look forward to building on this encouraging outcome in the immediate future, as we continue to improve our FTP processes."

During the audit of the GOC's investigation processes, the CHRE reviewed every complaint (84 in total) that the Investigation Committee had decided not refer to the FTP Committee during the period from April 2008 to March 2009.

The full audit report is available at, www.chre.org.uk

Who sits on the GOC's Investigation Committee?

See page 11 for a full run-down on who's who on the GOC's committees.

The CHRE is due to publish its annual performance review 2009-10 of the GOC's work, in July. Check the GOC website, www.optical.org for news on the report as it's published.



OHPA to hold hearings in London and Manchester

The Office of the Health Professions Adjudicator (OHPA) has announced that it will hold hearings in both London and Manchester.

The General Medical Council (GMC) will transfer its FTP hearings to OHPA from 1 April 2011. It is expected that the transfer of the GOC's hearings will follow, but that this will not take place before April 2012 at the earliest. Over time, OHPA may potentially take over the hearings for other healthcare regulators.

The OHPA team is currently housed in Department of Health

premises at New Kings Beam House, Upper Ground, London and expects to be moving to new London headquarters later this year.

Looking ahead to April 2011, OHPA will retain the GMC offices in Manchester, which accommodate staff and hearing rooms, and will keep a location in London but it is not yet decided where this will be. For more information on OHPA, visit www.ohpa.org.uk

You can read an interview with the OHPA chair, Walter Merricks, in the last issue of *Bulletin*, available from www.optical.org

GOC clarifies business registration requirements

Got a view?

Have your say by emailing us at bulletin@optical.org or writing to:

**The Editor
GOC Bulletin
41 Harley Street
London W1G 8DJ**

The GOC has clarified business registration requirements after becoming aware of some confusion on the issue amongst practitioners, and in the light of recent changes to the General Ophthalmic Service (GOS) regulations in England.

Under the Opticians Act, all limited companies, limited liability partnerships and, in Scotland, partnerships must register with the GOC if they are taking or using certain titles. These titles include:

- (Ophthalmic) optician
- Optometrist
- Dispensing optician
- Registered optician

Any business that is taking or using these titles when it is not

registered, or falsely implying or pretending that it is registered, may face prosecution.

Current UK law states that taking or using the title 'optician' is taken to imply registration, unless it is used in circumstances where it would be unreasonable for people to believe that the optical business in question was registered.

The requirements do not apply to certain kinds of business, for example partnerships (in England, Northern Ireland and Wales) and sole traders.

The requirements under the Opticians Act apply irrespective of any changes to the requirements for businesses to be registered under GOS regulations.