

bulletin

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Registrants hit CET target

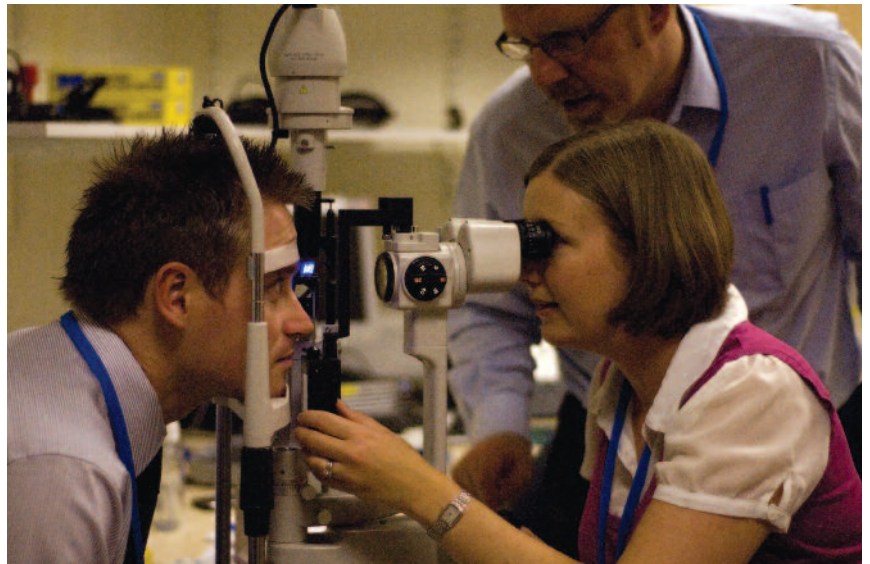
By Clare March

As 2009 came to a close, GOC registrants had cause to celebrate as an impressive 96 per cent met their minimum CET points requirement by the CET cycle deadline.

The 2007-9 CET cycle finished on 31 December, and 97 per cent of optometrists, 92 per cent of dispensing opticians, 94 per cent of contact lens opticians and 92 per cent of therapeutics registrants earned the minimum number of points required in order to maintain their GOC registration. When compared to the end of the last cycle in 2006, this represents a six per cent increase in the number of registrants who passed the CET requirements by the deadline.

Within a three-year CET cycle, full practitioners are required to earn 36 general points, and 18 specialty points where appropriate. For those joining the registers part-way through a cycle, the requirement is calculated pro rata. The end of cycle statistics show that thousands of registrants smashed the minimum points requirement, with many earning in excess of 36 points. In total, 17,344 registrants earned above and beyond their points requirement. The registrant with the highest points total earned 662 general points – more than 18 times the 36 general points requirement.

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Have you renewed yet?



All full registrants must renew their GOC registration by 15 March, or risk being removed from the registers.

Practitioners must complete and return the *Application for retention 2010-11* form, along with the appropriate payment of £325 for optometrists and £280 for dispensing opticians. Those who pay by direct debit must still send in their completed retention form.

Registrants who miss the 15 March deadline, but who get their application in before 31 March will have to pay a £20 late fee on top of the full retention fee.

Practitioners who do not renew their registration by 31 March, including payment of a late fee where applicable, risk removal from the registers from 1 April and will not be able to practise until they have restored to the registers.

Any registrant who has not received their retention form should contact the registration team to ensure their address details are up to date. Call **020 7580 3898**, option 1, or email goc@optical.org. Forms can be downloaded from www.optical.org

You can now track your retention application through the new Registrants area of www.optical.org. See page 4 for full details.

In this issue

Promote your registration with the GOC's 'toolkit'

Get involved in your revalidation scheme

How the Codes of Conduct have changed – and why

What is OHPA?

Registrants hit CET target

Commenting on a successful result for the optical professions, Dian Taylor, GOC chief executive and registrar said: "This is an excellent result for registrants. Optometrists and dispensing opticians have demonstrated a clear understanding of what it means to be a registered professional."

Dian Taylor added: "This cycle's CET results are also great news for patients. The fact that the overwhelming majority of UK opticians are equipped with the most up to date expertise and skills means that patients have the reassurance that they are being treated by competent professionals who are committed to patient care."

By comparison, there are still a minority who have failed to earn sufficient CET points to stay on the registers from the start of the next retention year. As *Bulletin* went to press, 331 optometrists, 359 dispensing opticians, 58 contact lens opticians and six therapeutics specialty practitioners were in a points shortfall – risking their GOC registration, and their ability to work.

"Optometrists and dispensing opticians have demonstrated a clear understanding of what it means to be a registered professional."

Optometrists with either the supplementary and/ or additional supply of therapeutic drugs specialty; and dispensing opticians with the contact lens specialty, are required to earn 18 specialty CET points in addition to 36 general points. Practitioners with a shortfall in specialty points only, will have the specialty removed from their entry in the registers.

Practitioners in shortfall were issued with a formal notification in early January. They now have until 15 March to earn sufficient CET

to allow them to apply for 2010-11 retention. Those who fail to earn enough points will be removed from the registers from 1 April.

Registrants with a shortfall in CET points are not eligible to apply for 2010-11 retention until they have made up that shortfall. Practitioners must confirm that they have completed their CET requirement as part of the retention application form.

The next cycle

The new CET cycle runs from 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2012. This is the last cycle to run its course before revalidation is introduced for all fully-registered optometrists and dispensing opticians, in January 2013. Proposals for the revalidation scheme are currently in development, but it is anticipated that CET may be eligible as evidence towards revalidation and registrants gaining a 'licence to practise'.

Message from the Editor

Firstly, I'd like to wish you a belated happy new year!

And secondly, a huge congratulations to the 96 per cent of optometrists and dispensing opticians who successfully earned their CET points target by the 31 December 2009 deadline. It really is a fantastic result for the professions.

This is the first *Bulletin* of the new decade, and as we leave the noughties behind, in this issue we take a closer look at the most significant developments affecting registrants in 2010 and beyond.

Turn to page 4 to catch up with all things retention-related. We explore the new online Registrants area that's now up and running, so keeping track of your retention application has never been easier. You can also find out more about how to promote your GOC registration to patients and the public on page 5.

If the acronym OHPA means nothing to you, on page 11 we chat to Walter Merricks, the new Chair of the Office of the Health Professions Adjudicator to find out what lies ahead for the new independent hearings body.

Finally, you may have already noticed that a copy of the new Code of Conduct for Individual Practitioners is included with this issue for all registrants. You can find out more about how and why your Code of Conduct has changed on page 7.

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

Until next time,

Clare March Editor

Want to get involved in shaping your revalidation scheme?

The GOC is holding five stakeholder events across the UK in February 2010, to listen to your thoughts and suggestions on how revalidation will work. The events will take place on the following dates:

- 8 February - Cardiff
- 10 February - Manchester
- 16 February - London
- 18 February - Edinburgh
- 19 February - Belfast

For full details see page 6.



Geoff Harris

Message from the Chair

As I write this message we are approaching the end of 2009, and the end of the second successful cycle of Continuing Education and Training.

CET is one of the most significant aspects of modern regulation, and the number of practitioners who have passed, and in many cases significantly

exceeded, their CET requirement tells you everything you need to know about the optical professions.

The overwhelming majority of registrants I meet are dedicated and enthusiastic about keeping their knowledge and skills up to date, and developing as professionals in order to provide a better service to their patients and the public.

In recent weeks I have been asked on a number of occasions what the value of regulation is to such practitioners. The history of professional self-regulation testifies to the close association of professional and public interests. Practitioners setting up the first registers saw the value of being part of a recognised profession, with restrictions on who could claim membership. In the process, the creation of registers gave the public assurance for the first time that they were not dealing with quacks and charlatans.

Regulation, and the meaning of registration, has developed significantly since then. It is no longer simply a guarantee that an

individual has received systematic training. In addition to educational qualifications, regulators set standards for registrants' character, conduct, ongoing education and training, and indemnity insurance arrangements, and take action in the rare cases where practitioners fall below these standards.

"The overwhelming majority of registrants I meet are dedicated and enthusiastic about keeping their knowledge and skills up to date."

It is important for the GOC and the optical professions to promote registration in order to benefit from the increased public confidence and trust which flows from effective regulation. Details of a new 'toolkit' to help registrants to do just that are on page 5. Promoting a wider understanding of our role and engaging stakeholders in our work will also be one of the GOC's three strategic priorities over the next five years.

Through these efforts, we will be able to enhance further the status of the optical professions amongst the wider public, reinforce public confidence in the professions we regulate, and, most importantly, promote public safety and well being.

Geoff Harris

Independent prescribers join GOC registers

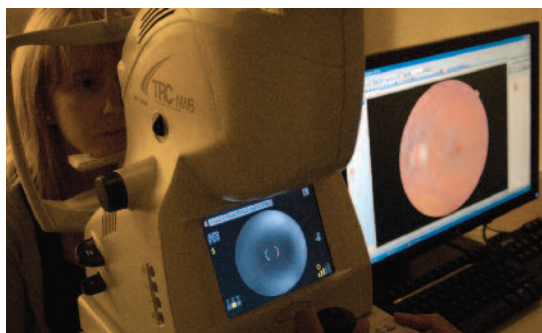
From 1 December 2009, the first optometrists who are qualified to independently prescribe medicines had the new Independent Prescribing (IP) speciality entered against their name in the GOC registers.

IP specialists can prescribe any licensed medicine for the treatment of ocular conditions affecting the eye and surrounding tissue, independently of a GP or ophthalmologist.

So far, 22 optometrists have registered to have the IP speciality entered against their name in the Opticians Registers. In total, 30 optometrists have passed the College of Optometrists' Final Assessment in IP and are eligible to apply to become IP speciality practitioners.

The first courses in independent prescribing began in April 2009. Approved courses are run by three education establishments:

- City University;
- Glasgow Caledonian University; and
- A joint course between Manchester University and Aston University.



The first part of the course is taught theory, which is usually conducted through a combination of workshops, lectures and distance learning. This is followed by a clinical placement under the supervision of an ophthalmologist.

Further information on training courses is available from www.optical.org

What can be prescribed under the three therapeutics specialties?

Additional supply (AS)

Optometrists registered with the AS speciality are qualified to:

- Supply and administer extra prescription-only medicines, in addition to those prescribed by a regular optometrist.
- Manage conditions which are not sight-threatening.
- Prescribe drugs including topical antibiotics, lubricants and antihistamines.

Supplementary prescribing (SP)

Optometrists registered with the SP speciality are qualified to use any medicine prescribed to treat an eye condition, but only when working with a registered independent prescriber. This might be a GP, an ophthalmologist, or an optometrist with the IP speciality registered against their name.

Independent prescribing (IP)

- The drugs with which an independent prescriber can work are dependent on the optometrist's own competence and scope of practice.
- Independent prescribers mainly work in primary eyecare and the treatment of glaucoma.

Lowdown: the new Vetting and Barring scheme

The Government is introducing a new scheme designed to prevent unsuitable people working with children and vulnerable adults.

Who is covered?

All currently practising GOC registrants (including students) will be covered by the definitions of regulated activity. Some support staff may come under the definitions of regulated or controlled activity. Employers of these staff should ensure they understand the requirements.

What is required?

All individuals employed in regulated activities (including students carrying out these activities under supervision) will need to register with the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA). Employers must check the ISA registration status of individuals employed in regulated activity. Requirements relating to controlled activity will come into force from 2014.

When is it happening?

It is already an offence for a barred individual to engage in regulated activity or for an employer to knowingly employ a barred individual in regulated activity. New entrants to the workforce and those moving jobs will be eligible to register from **July 2010**.

From **November 2010** it will be a criminal offence for anyone in this group to engage in regulated activity if they are not ISA-registered (or for an employer to engage someone who is not ISA-registered). A change of employer is defined as being when a new body becomes responsible for checks (for example, moving to a different PCT within the NHS).

Anyone else who is covered by the scheme will be eligible to join from **January 2011** and will have to be ISA-registered within five years.

Does it apply across the UK?

The Vetting and Barring scheme will apply in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. A separate Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) scheme will apply in Scotland.

What will it cost?

Applications for ISA registration will cost £64 in England and Wales and £58 in Northern Ireland.

For more information:

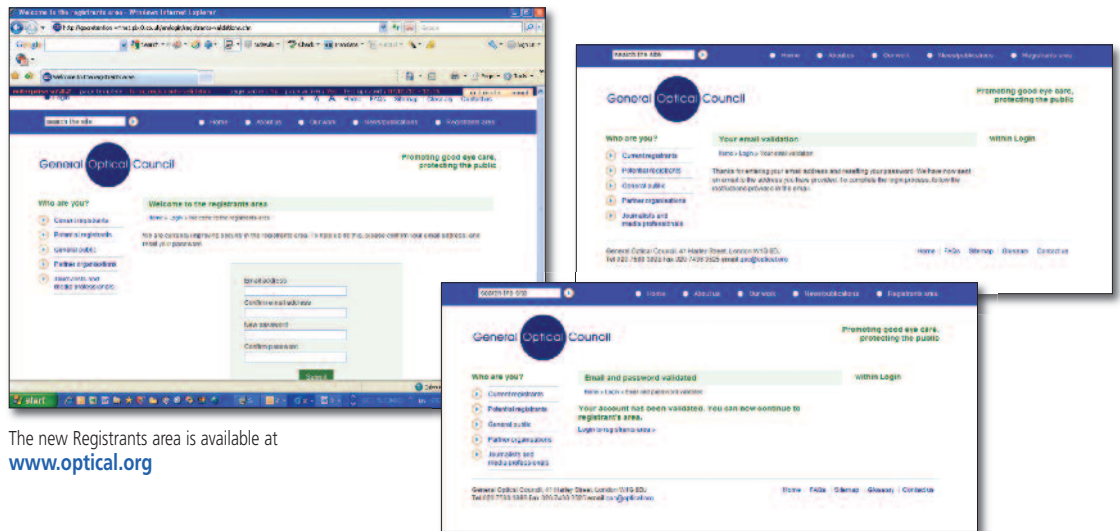
www.isa.gov.org
www.scotland.gov.uk

“All individuals employed in regulated activities will need to register with the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA).”



Online retention-tracker goes live

In January, the GOC launched the new Registrants area of www.optical.org. The Registrants area is available to all individual and business registrants, and offers a more efficient and user-friendly way of tracking your annual retention application.



The new Registrants area is available at www.optical.org

What does the Registrants area offer?

Registrants are now able to receive automatic confirmation that the GOC has received their completed retention form, and that full payment has been taken. You can download a payment confirmation and receipt. Replacement personalised retention application forms can also be downloaded.

How do I log in?

Details of how to log into the new Registrants area were included in the retention packs sent out to all fully-registered practitioners and optical businesses from December 2009. When accessing the Registrants area for the first time, registrants are asked to provide an up to date email address. This enables the GOC to get in touch quickly and easily if there is a problem with your retention

application or payment. An email address is essential to ensure that important updates on issues including registration reach practitioners in a timely way.

Future developments

Work is ongoing to bring registrants a complete online retention system. The new system will offer increased functionality to provide a simpler, more accessible service. It will also create long-term cost savings.

When launched, online retention will enable registrants to fill in their retention application and pay their fee on the GOC website. This will reduce problems such as forms being lost in the post.

Practitioners will still be able to use paper forms for a short time alongside the online system, whilst online retention is fully established.

All change for 2010-11 retention fees

The GOC retention fee for full individual and business registrants has increased. For 2010-11 optometrists and dispensing opticians will pay a different fee amount.

- The annual retention fee for **optometrists** has increased from £219 to **£325**.
- The annual retention fee for **dispensing opticians** has increased from £219 to **£280**.

The new fee amounts apply to the next retention period, which runs from 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011.

Changes to the retention fee structure and amount were agreed by Council in November 2009. When considering options for the 2010-11 retention fees, members recognised that this is a further significant increase for both the optical professions, particularly in the current economic climate. However, the Council's operating expenditure has risen sharply over the past five years, and until last year the fee amount had not increased. Previously, some increased costs were absorbed by surplus funds in reserves, but this policy is no longer sustainable. In addition, further increases in expenditure

have arisen through the need to modernise processes and systems, and to meet changing statutory obligations.

Commenting on the increase, Dian Taylor, chief executive and registrar said: "We are acutely aware that this fee rise will be tough for the professions, many of whom are feeling the impact of the recession. I assure registrants that this decision was not taken lightly.

"The GOC is also continuing to look at the option of staged payments. This would allow registrants to pay their fee in instalments."

"The Council's budgeting processes have been rigorous and entirely transparent. No fee increase will ever be popular, but we do not have the option of 'standing still'. We need to invest in essential modernisation work to our processes and systems, affecting core areas such as FTP. This will lead to improved quality and efficiency of service which will benefit registrants in the future."

The GOC introduced differential fees for 2010-11 in response to



Promoting your registration: GOC develops 'toolkit'

From this Spring, all full GOC registrants will have a helping hand to promote their registration to patients and the public. In response to feedback from optometrists, dispensing opticians and registered optical businesses, the GOC is developing a 'registration toolkit' containing practical guidance and materials to help eyecare professionals highlight their registered status.

Full registrants and optical businesses will be able to download a new GOC-registered logo from the Registrants area of the GOC website, www.optical.org. The logo can be used on practice stationery such as letterheads, patient appointment cards and business cards. A web-friendly version of the logo will also be available.

Every full registrant will receive a booklet, 'Making the most of your GOC registration'. This offers advice for practitioners on simple but effective ways of promoting GOC registration, including wearing your GOC number on your name badge whilst at work, and advising locums to carry their GOC certificate with them.

"The toolkit should provide registrants with a way of highlighting their registered status, and in turn reinforcing patients' confidence in their services."

A copy of a patient information leaflet will also be included, which practitioners are encouraged to stock within their practice. The leaflet explains to patients that GOC-registered optometrists and dispensing opticians are qualified professionals who must meet certain standards, and urges them to check for the GOC-registered logo when they visit their optician.

Kate Fielding, director of communications and information said: "Practitioners have frequently asked us to provide them with materials and advice on ways to promote their registration to patients. In particular, there has been strong demand for a GOC-registered logo. The toolkit should provide registrants with a way of



highlighting their registered status, and in turn reinforcing patients' confidence in their services.

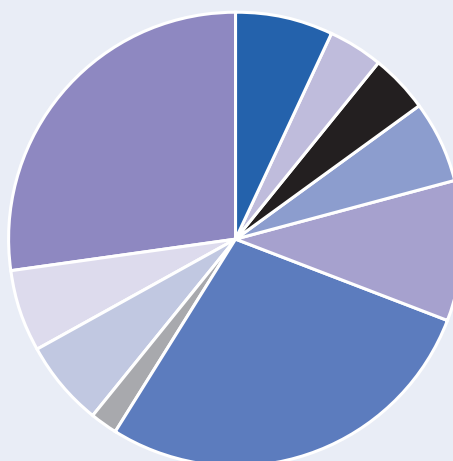
"To ensure the toolkit meets our registrants' needs we have consulted extensively with optometrists, dispensing opticians and registered businesses from day one of the project. Optical professionals are highly skilled and dedicated to providing the UK public with quality eyecare – we'd like patients to understand more about those services and have the reassurance of knowing they are regulated."

support from practitioners and representative bodies. In November 2008, optical bodies and registrants requested that the GOC consider differential fees, particularly for dispensing opticians. In 2009, the GOC launched a three-month consultation on the registration and retention fee structure. The consultation invited comment on a range of issues, and responses demonstrated support for introducing a lower fee for dispensing opticians. It was felt that a lower fee would reflect the fact that: dispensing is largely deregulated; dispensing opticians often earn less than optometrists; and dispensers make up a smaller proportion of GOC fitness to practise cases.

Further work will be undertaken next year to determine the GOC's long term fee structure, including whether differential fees should be maintained in the future.

The GOC is also continuing to look at the option of staged payments. This would allow registrants to pay their fee in instalments. Introducing staged payments would involve changing current legislation, which is a costly, and time-consuming process. Council will therefore consider the full costs, and potential risks and benefits of introducing the facility over the next year, before reaching a decision.

Where is the money going?



2010-11 budgeted expenditure by department:

- Council 7%
- Secretariat 4%
- Standards 4%
- Education 6%
- Registration 10%
- FTP 27%
- OCCS 2%
- CET 6%
- Communications 6%
- Support services 20%

For a detailed look at GOC expenditure, budgets and business plans visit www.optical.org

Shaping the new revalidation scheme

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

The General Optical Council has announced five stakeholder events to be held across the UK in February 2010. The Council wants to hear from registrants, optical bodies, patients and the public, on key issues affecting the revalidation scheme for UK opticians. Delegates will also gain an overview of the progress and work completed on revalidation so far.

Events are taking place on the following dates:

- 8 February, Wales Millennium Centre
Bute Place, Cardiff, CF10 5AL
- 10 February, Britannia Hotel
Portland Street, Manchester, M1 3LA
- 16 February, Park Crescent Conference Centre
229 Great Portland Street, London, W1W 5PN
- 18 February, Caledonian Hilton Hotel
Princes Street, Edinburgh, EH1 2AB
- 19 February, Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland
73 University St, Belfast, BT7 1HL

The events will start at 10:00 and finish at 15:45, and lunch will be provided.

What will be discussed?

Each event will open with an update from the GOC on the current plans and progress around revalidation proposals. This will be followed by two presentations outlining the findings of independent research projects carried out on two key areas of the proposed scheme:

- Profiling the risks in the optical profession – what does it tell us about the focus of revalidation?
- Employer appraisal – can it be used in revalidation?

Presentations will be followed by a group discussion giving attendees the opportunity to challenge the research findings, and to suggest issues for further consultation in these key areas.

Presentations and a full feedback report from the events will be published on the GOC's website in March. The GOC will also launch its second full consultation on the proposals later this year. Findings from February's discussion events will shape the consultation questions on the proposed approaches to employer appraisal and risk profiling.

Commenting on the events, GOC director of standards, Jon Levett urged registrants to get involved: “This is your revalidation scheme, and to make it work we need to consider all perspectives, relevant issues, concerns and ideas. Consultation and listening events such as these will ensure we are equipped to deliver a proportionate, cost-effective scheme.”

To reserve your place on any of the events, or for more information, contact Simon Grier on 020 7307 3478 or email sgrier@optical.org. Alternatively, you can visit the events section of the GOC website, www.optical.org for further information and to sign up online.

Revalidation research projects

Employer appraisal research has been carried out to establish whether the GOC should accredit employer appraisal schemes so that they can be used as evidence towards revalidation, and in turn, practitioners gaining a licence to practise. The research examined appraisal schemes that are currently operating within optical practices, and whether these schemes will provide suitable evidence for revalidation. The research also established whether employers are willing to adapt their appraisal schemes.

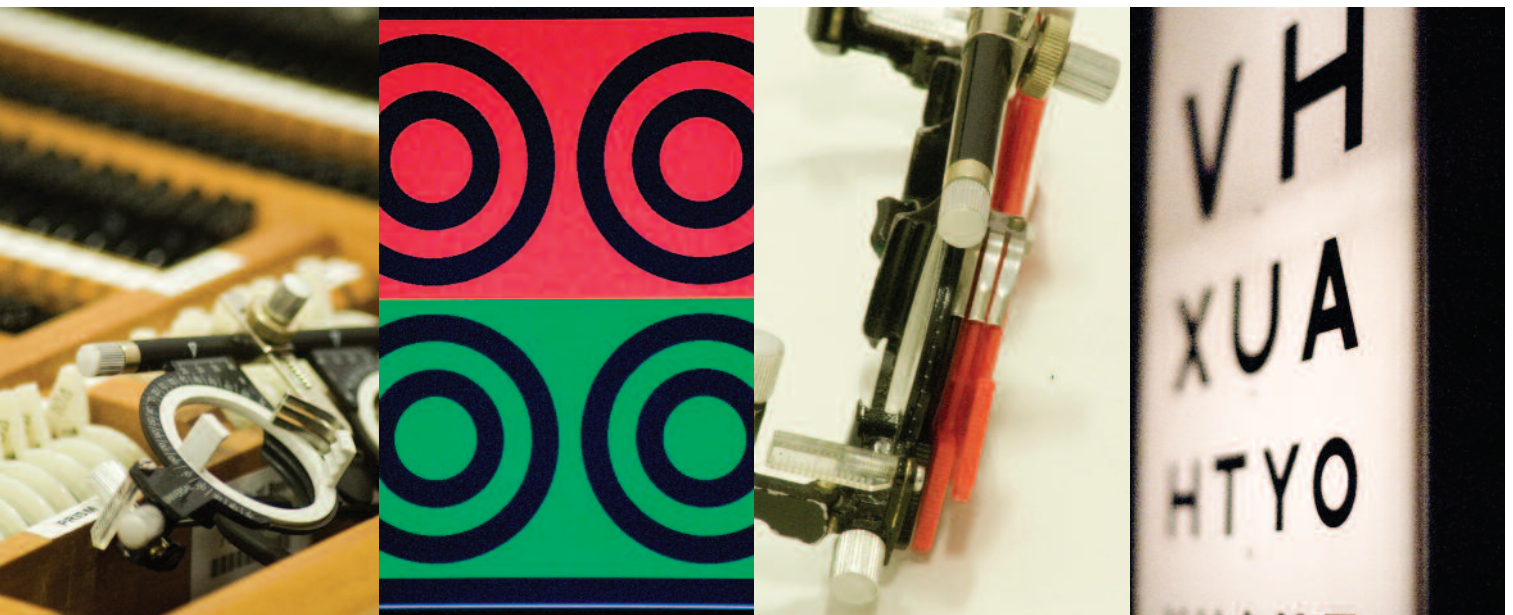
Risk profiling research has identified the high-level risks in optical practice, and the scope and areas of practice that are the highest risk to patient safety.

Future work

Future work on revalidation in 2010 will include:

- Exploring the accreditation of GOS schemes, such as those in place in Scotland and Wales. This will involve reviewing and examining the accreditation schemes already in place and evaluating their applicability as evidence for revalidation.
- Establishing how appropriate CET might be as evidence toward revalidation, particularly in relation to high-risk areas of practice.
- Outlining which groups of registrants will need a licence to practise, and establishing the guidelines and parameters for this.

Stakeholder events and consultations will be undertaken on each of these areas throughout 2010.



The new Codes of Conduct: what you need to know

The GOC approved new Codes of Conduct for individual and business registrants in November 2009. *Grahame Tinsley*, GOC Assistant Director of Standards examines the key changes, and how they affect registrants.

The GOC has published new Codes of Conduct for individual and business registrants. All individual registrants, including students, will receive a copy of the revised Code of Conduct with this issue of *Bulletin*. The new Codes of Conduct come into force on 1 April 2010.

What are the main changes for individual practitioners?

The new Code features changes in a number of key areas, such as:

Providing information on fitness to practise concerns

The new Code makes it clear that concerns about a registrant's fitness to practise should be reported quickly, and that registrants should cooperate with any fitness to practise enquiries. The Code also emphasises that not all concerns need to be directly reported to the GOC, and that resolution at a local level will often be more appropriate.

Ensuring registrants' conduct does not damage public confidence

The Code asserts that it is not merely inappropriate conduct in a registrant's professional life which may put their registration at risk, but also their personal conduct whilst not practising.

Having adequate and appropriate insurance

The new Code of Conduct makes it clear that all registered practitioners must have adequate and appropriate insurance. This includes those who are in the UK on a temporary and occasional basis; and those undertaking training or practical experience.

"The Code also emphasises that not all concerns need to be directly reported to the GOC, and that resolution at a local level will often be more appropriate."

Ensuring registrants are aware of and comply with the guidance published by the professional bodies

Registrants' responsibility to adhere to the latest guidance issued by the professional bodies, at all times, is also highlighted. Professional guidance for optometrists is published by the College of Optometrists, and is available at: www.college-optometrists.org Professional guidance for dispensing opticians is published by the Association of British Dispensing Opticians, and is available at: www.abdo.org.uk

What are the main changes for business registrants?

The Code of Conduct for Business Registrants includes changes in the following areas:

Clinical governance

The new Code for business registrants makes it clear that GOC-registered businesses need to be aware of, and comply with, any national or local standards and guidance relating to clinical governance. Clinical governance exists to support professionals so they can practise safely and effectively.

Where there may be problems with a registrant's fitness to practise, clinical governance guides registrants, employers, and patients to effectively identify and report concerns, thus minimising the risks to patients.



Providing information on fitness to practise concerns

Business registrants have an obligation to act quickly if they have concerns about their own, or other health professionals' or organisations', ability to practise safely and effectively, or to be trusted to act legally. This includes an obligation to cooperate with fitness to practise enquiries.

Financial and commercial dealings

The Code stipulates that businesses must not engage in any practice that compromises patient safety.

How and why were the Codes of Conduct reviewed?

Since their introduction in 2005, the GOC has reviewed the Codes of Conduct regularly to ensure they remain relevant, up-to-date and reflect best regulatory practice. Areas for improvement were identified and in 2008, Council consolidated this feedback into proposed changes to the Codes. The GOC launched a three-month consultation on the changes, inviting feedback from registrants, employers, the optical bodies, patients and the public. In April 2009, the GOC also hosted a stakeholder event in London which was well attended, and enabled GOC staff and members to listen to delegates' views on what the new Codes should cover. To find out more about the Codes of Conduct consultation event, visit our online 2008-9 annual report at: <http://annualreport08-09.optical.org/work>

As the Codes were being formulated, Council also considered the codes of conduct from other regulatory bodies, current CHRE standards and changes to government legislation, to ensure the revised versions are comprehensive, proportionate and fit for purpose.

GOC appoints new committee members

The GOC is in the final stages of appointing members to sit on its statutory Education, Standards, Registration and Investigation committees.

In Autumn 2009, the GOC launched a recruitment drive for up to 50 committee members who would provide advice and support to the Council on a range of issues. The campaign attracted in excess of 200 applications from optometrists, dispensing opticians, lay people and ophthalmologists.

Dian Taylor, chief executive and registrar commented: "We've had an overwhelming response to the appointments campaign which is very encouraging. Our policies affect registrants, patients and the public in equal measure, so it is reassuring that we had such a strong pool of candidates from which to appoint."

"We've had an overwhelming response to the appointments campaign which is very encouraging."

The first appointments were announced in January, for those appointed to the Council's Registration and Investigation committees. Appointments to the remaining committees will follow in March, and names will be published on the Council's website, www.optical.org. All committee members will take up office before April.



What does each committee do?

Standards Committee advises Council on matters relating to the standards of performance and conduct that GOC registrants, and potential registrants, must meet.

Education Committee sets the criteria for GOC-approved courses in optics, approves courses which meet GOC standards and carries out visits to quality assure courses.

Registration Committee advises Council on issues regarding GOC registration.

Investigation Committee considers evidence about fitness to practise complaints and decides what course of action to take.

When is the next Council meeting?

All Council meetings are open to the public and are held at the GOC's offices, 41 Harley Street, London W1G 8DJ. Dates for 2010 are as follows:

25 February: 11:00

17 June: 11:00 (venue tbc)

23 September: 09:30

25 November: 11:00

Interested in attending? Email mclaridge@optical.org. Further details, Council papers, agendas and minutes are available at www.optical.org

Autumn 2009 events



Leader of the Liberal Democrats, Nick Clegg, visits the EHA exhibition stand

The Autumn was a busy time for GOC staff and Council members who met with registrants, the public and other stakeholders, at various events across the UK.

8-9 September: Citizens Advice Conference

This was the first time the GOC had exhibited at the CAB's annual conference. GOC staff met patient groups and bureau managers to raise awareness of optical regulation. At the conference, the GOC also launched two patient information leaflets to explain the GOC's role, and how it can help patients. These are both available from www.optical.org

3-5 October: ABDO Conference

Council staff were on hand at the ABDO Conference to answer queries from dispensing opticians on a number of issues. With the Conference taking place just three months before the end of the 2007-9 CET cycle, this was the main talking point. Revalidation was also a topic of interest and GOC deputy registrar, Jon Levett delivered a presentation to DOs on the possible implications of the scheme.

27-28 October: Scottish Health Service Annual Regulation Conference

The GOC met other regulators, NHS staff and patients for whom revalidation is also high on the agenda. Staff and Council members were able to gain a good insight into other regulators' revalidation schemes, and benefit from feedback on the GOC's own proposals.

Eye Health Alliance: political party conferences

As part of the Eye Health Alliance, the GOC exhibited at the three main political party conferences throughout September and October. The EHA aimed to raise awareness of eye health issues amongst the political parties, and to promote the benefits of regular sight tests. The Alliance spoke to large numbers of MPs, peers, councillors and parliamentary candidates. The EHA is a coalition of the optical bodies and eyecare charities who work together to promote eye health for all.

Events in 2010

The GOC will continue to exhibit at key stakeholder events throughout the year, kicking off with the Optometry Tomorrow conference in York, 18-19 April.

How can the Opticians Registers be improved?

Last Autumn, the GOC held a series of listening events around the UK on how the Opticians Registers could be improved. The events were held in Belfast, Birmingham, Cardiff and Edinburgh, as part of a project to research the content and accessibility of the registers.

Participants suggested a number of possible additions to the registers. It was noted, however, that there were obstacles to expanding the available information, including privacy issues. Much discussion centred on whether the registers should be a basic, authoritative list of qualified practitioners, or a 'directory-style' listing allowing searches for opticians with particular skills or experience.

Some delegates felt that the GOC should consider re-introducing a printed register to be left in public places such as libraries (hard copies were discontinued in 2005). However, the cost of printing

and distribution was acknowledged and most felt that the existing telephone and internet system is adequate.

There was also much discussion of the need for the public to be more aware of GOC registration – see page five for an update on the work the GOC is doing in this area.

The events also looked at the GOC's future strategy and gave stakeholders a chance to meet Council members – at least one member attended every event along with members of staff. The formal part of each evening was followed by an informal networking session, where registrants were able to discuss their thoughts and concerns with the GOC. An independent facilitator helped to run the events.

For a more detailed report of these events visit, www.optical.org

“The events also looked at the GOC's future strategy and gave stakeholders a chance to meet Council members.”

GOC consultation round-up

Since the last issue of *Bulletin*, the GOC has been listening to registrants, patients and the optical bodies across the UK, gathering views on the key policy issues affecting them.

Five-year strategy

The GOC has just completed a two-phase consultation to set its strategy for 2010-15. The consultation asked a series of questions about what the GOC's future work priorities should be. A number of stakeholder organisations, including optical bodies, patient groups and charities, were also invited to present their views to Council members.

Council used this feedback to formulate a draft strategy, on which it consulted from December to January. The draft strategic five-year plan (2010-15) sets out three priorities:

- Continue to modernise core functions and put in place systems for improvement to become more efficient and more effective (for example in registration and FTP);
- Develop the regulatory framework to support UK eyecare in delivering safe, high-quality care which meets society's needs and expectations; and
- Continue to promote a wider understanding of the GOC's role and engage stakeholders in its work.

Feedback on this draft strategy is now being analysed, and the final strategy will be approved on 25 February. The new strategy will come into effect on 1 April.

Investigation Committee guidance

The Investigation Committee guidance is a document to assist the Committee when it considers what action to take, if any, when considering fitness to practise complaints against GOC registrants. The GOC consulted on this guidance in August 2009. Responses are now being analysed and the GOC will consider whether to make any alterations in light of the consultation responses. The guidance will then go to the GOC's Investigation Committee for approval.

Welsh Language Scheme

The GOC launched its Welsh Language Scheme in November 2009 after a consultation. Under the scheme, a number of publications are available in Welsh. This has so far included the GOC's 2008-9 annual report; and a number of patient information leaflets. To view the Annual Report in Welsh visit, <http://annualreport08-09.optical.org>. You can find out more about the Welsh Language Scheme on the policies, protocols and procedures page of the GOC website, www.optical.org

Revalidation

The GOC has been consulting on draft proposals for a revalidation scheme for optometrists and dispensing opticians. See page 6 for more details.

Registration fee structure

The GOC launched a consultation in July 2009 to review the structure of its registration fees. The consultation looked at a number of issues including whether optometrists and dispensing opticians should continue to pay the same fee.

See page 4 for more information on retention fees.



Common FTP complaints and how to avoid them



“The IC is fully aware of the staffing issues and shortage of appointments that affect practices day to day.”

It is a testament to the professionalism of GOC registrants that, in 2008-9 the Council’s Investigation Committee (IC) considered only 150 complaints out of 19.6 million sight tests, *writes Donald Cameron, Chair of the GOC’s Investigation Committee (IC)*. Of that total, only 31 were referred to the Fitness to Practise Committee. Amongst those cases are recurring themes which bear closer examination.

Lack of communication

The lack of communication with patients is surprising. Complaints often arise when a patient has an eye exam, but is unhappy with the spectacles supplied and returns to the practice for advice. The patient is rechecked and told nothing more can be done. They then go for a second opinion and are informed that they have cataracts. Quite reasonably, the patient is distressed and believes that the first optometrist must have been incompetent not to have noticed the cataract – twice.

Frequently, however, the explanation is that at R 6/6+ N5 and L 6/9 N6, the VA was not sufficiently impaired to require operation. Hence the optometrist in question did not refer the patient.

Explaining this reasoning to the patient establishes a professional relationship where the patient is in an informed position. They are able to judge when their cataract begins to cause inconvenience to their daily life, and seek further treatment.

The College of Optometrists has published amended guidance on advising patients about cataracts (D1.03). Visit the College website, www.college-optometrists.org

Supervising trainees

The issue of supervising dispensing and optometric trainees is a recurring issue in cases presented to the IC. Dispensing to children under 16 or to a patient who is registered blind can only be carried out by a registered dispensing optician or optometrist. If you have non-registered staff who do dispense spectacles, they must have their work with such vulnerable patients checked and supervised by a qualified person.

If a patient is being examined by a trainee optometrist it is common courtesy to inform the patient of that, at the time of booking their appointment. It is also good practice to offer the option of being seen by a qualified optometrist.

The IC is fully aware of the staffing issues and shortage of appointments that affect practices day to day. But if things go wrong, such as incorrect Rx, pathology missed or incorrect spectacles issued, then the patient frequently feels, quite rightly, that the error would not have been allowed to happen had they been treated by a qualified person. Rescuing the situation when they find out their care was being provided by a trainee is extremely difficult.

For dispensing opticians, the practice should develop a system that requires a formal ‘sign off’ before a dispense to children or vulnerable groups is completed. For optometrists, the supervisor should lay down strict rules of when they are to be called for an opinion. These might be: if pressures are over 21; if you are unable to see the fundus clearly; or if you cannot find a reason for the patient’s complaint.

Applying for retention

When completing registration, restoration or annual retention forms, practitioners are asked to disclose all criminal cautions and convictions. However, each year a number of registrants do not declare cautions. A caution is an acceptance of guilt and can be considered to be a serious matter by the IC, particularly where violence or substance abuse is involved. Failure to include it on your application form will only compound the issue.

“Transparency is essential to ensure that the patient does not feel that they have been financially disadvantaged or restricted in the choice that is their right.”

Consumer confusion over contact lens specifications

The Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS) has reported increasing confusion and irritation from consumers over the issue of contact lens specifications. The increasing inclination towards shopping online, and the desire in the current economic climate to get the best possible value for money, has brought this issue to the fore. *Richard Wilshin, OCCS Administrator* explains.

Case study

A patient emails to say he has been using the same practitioner for years but has now decided to shop around for his lenses. However, he finds this ‘almost impossible to do’. On asking their regular optometrist for the prescription, the patient is told it will cost £50 for the eye test, but if he wants a copy of the prescription so he can shop around for lenses, he will be charged £45 for it. ‘Is this right?’, he asks. ‘This seems to me to be sharp practice as it is effectively a lock-in policy’.

As is often the case, the patient has confused a sight test *prescription* with a contact lens *specification*. The former should of course be freely given to the patient on completion of the sight test. The contact lens specification however, does not have to be issued until the contact lens fitting has been completed, and it must be given to the patient at that point.

The OCCS explains this to the patient and suggests that he should seek clarification from his optometrist on exactly how their individual contact lens pricing structure operates. It may be that a practitioner’s pricing plan is to charge ‘chair time’ on the basis that lenses are supplied by him, and to increase the examination fee if lenses are not to be supplied. Such a practice needs to be carefully structured and explained to avoid allegations of ‘sharp practice’ and to comply with the law.

Transparency is essential to ensure the patient does not feel that they have been financially disadvantaged or restricted in the choice that is their right. Furthermore, if a fitting has been completed, and the *specification* has not changed and is up to date, the patient should be given this without an additional fee.



Introducing OHPA: an interview with Walter Merricks

Walter Merricks is the new Chair of the Office of the Health Professions Adjudicator. *Kate Fielding* finds out what he has planned.



Walter Merricks is relishing the challenge of creating the new adjudication body for the health professions. It is a job for which he is well qualified. Having trained as a lawyer, he worked in a variety of roles within the wider 'legal system' before being appointed as Financial Ombudsman ten years ago, a role in which he set up and oversaw the merger of six different ombudsman teams within the financial services sector.

"There are clear parallels - this challenge of bringing a new organisation into being, bringing out the best of what's been there before, but hopefully taking the opportunity to stand back and ask 'can we do any of this better?'. "

His first target is the speed and timeliness of cases. "Delays in bringing cases to a fitness to practise (FTP) determination can result in a very challenging and distressing time for registrants and their families, as well as employers, witnesses, and complainants. And of course if there is a public need to remove someone from the profession, then the sooner that happens the better."

"Delays in bringing cases to a fitness to practise (FTP) determination can result in a very challenging and distressing time for registrants and their families, as well as employers, witnesses, and complainants."

Key to improving the speed of cases will be achieving more robust 'case management'. "In most of the justice system there has been a big movement over recent years towards case management, so that the court has a clear idea at the outset of what the case is about, which issues are in dispute and which are not contested, and how long it is likely to take."

Merricks believes that OHPA will be able to have more structured arrangements for case management than has been possible for the GOC or the GMC. "At the moment when the GOC tries to engage a registrant or a registrant's lawyer in discussion about the process they are entitled to say, 'Well you are the ones bringing this case against me, I'm not obliged to tell you anything'. As an independent judicial body, we will be dealing with two parties and asking both to cooperate in everyone's interests."

In the long term, he is also hoping to bring the costs of adjudication down, and achieve greater consistency in the interests of both registrants and patients. "As the other regulatory bodies transfer their functions to OHPA, and as the infrastructure, staff training and so on can be shared across the territory, that ought to be capable of generating some economies of scale."

"There are also benefits in harmonisation - for example with a single set of rules which are fit for purpose. Or having a common

terminology. From the public point of view, that ought to be a fairly simple step - whether it's going to be 'striking off' or 'erasure' and so on."

Finally, and perhaps unsurprisingly for someone so steeped in the judiciary he lights on the concept of fairness, to be achieved by greater consistency. "If there are similar allegations about an optician, doctor, nurse or pharmacist, then one might expect a similar outcome. At the moment these decisions are made in isolation from one another."

He hopes OHPA will give confidence to both registrants and the public that cases are being dealt with properly and independently. "It's in everyone's interests to know that where allegations are founded, they are dealt with professionally, speedily and robustly. It is a stain on a profession to discover that that has not happened. So I think and hope that GOC registrants will feel proud of the step that the GOC has taken to bring them into this new system of adjudication, and that it will add to their confidence in the way that their profession is being regulated."

What is OHPA?

A new independent adjudication (hearings) body. It will hear GMC fitness to practise cases from April 2011, and subsequently (on a date yet to be confirmed) GOC cases. Over time it is expected that the other healthcare professional regulators will transfer their hearings to OHPA.

Why is OHPA being created?

To ensure a clear separation between the investigation of concerns about the fitness to practise of professionals, and the process of determining whether their fitness to practise is impaired.

What will OHPA do?

- Decide whether a doctor's or optician's fitness to practise is impaired;
- Ensure the safety of patients and the public by restricting or removing a doctor's or optician's right to practise where appropriate;
- Consider the need for temporary sanctions (interim orders) restricting or suspending a doctor's or optician's right to practise prior to a full hearing; and
- Decide whether a doctor or optician should be allowed to practise again after being removed from the registers for fitness to practise reasons.

How will the GOC's role change?

The GOC will remain the regulator for opticians and will continue to:

- Set the standards for professional practice for opticians;
- Receive and investigate complaints about opticians;
- Decide whether or not to refer optical professionals to a fitness to practise hearing; and
- Set indicative sanctions guidance (ie the guidance that OHPA panels will use to decide which sanctions are appropriate for particular conduct or performance issues).

Education visit reports published online

“Students and prospective students will benefit from being able to access information about the education and training on offer.”

At its November 2009 meeting, the Council agreed to make public its education visit reports. This is the first time that reports from the Council's quality-assurance visits have been made formally available to the public. Reports will be published on the GOC's website, www.optical.org



One of the Council's core functions is to approve and quality assure the optometry and dispensing optics courses which lead to GOC registration. As part of this work, a GOC visiting panel periodically visits each training institution. This enables the GOC to assess whether students are gaining the skills and knowledge required to practise safely.

Publishing visit reports will enable potential students and the public to be sure that each institution is training its students to the standards required to ensure public safety.

The reporting is expected of all healthcare regulators by the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence (CHRE), the body which oversees the work of all nine healthcare regulators in the UK. GOC director of education, Linda Kennaugh outlined the benefits of the move: "One of the GOC's core values is transparency throughout all of our core business activities. By making our visit reports available to the public on our website, people can have increased confidence in both the GOC and the education institutions that they are adequately preparing trainees for their career in optics.

"Students and prospective students will benefit from being able to access information about the education and training on offer at GOC-approved universities and colleges, in relation to GOC standards."

Each visit is conducted by an independent visiting panel, made up from the GOC's pool of 18 fully-trained members. The next planned visits are early this year, to Bradford College and ABDO Distance Learning Institute.

GOC clarifies requirements for contact lens specifications and prescriptions

The GOC responded to a recent editorial comment in *Optician* magazine on the requirements for providing contact lens specifications and general prescriptions to patients, particularly for online sales.

Online providers of contact lenses do not need to have the patient's spectacle prescription, nor the date of the corresponding eye test, in order to supply contact lenses. However, the GOC has highlighted that where sellers are working under the general direction of an optometrist, dispensing optician or doctor, and they do not have the original contact lens specification, they are required by law to have a copy of the patient's contact lens specification or an order from the purchaser; and to seek verification of that specification, from the patient's optometrist, contact lens optician or doctor. After a contact lens fitting, practitioners must always provide their patient with a valid contact lens specification. Practitioners

should be prepared to confirm details of the specification to suppliers in order for them to meet the verification requirements.

Many consumer enquiries and complaints result from confusion about entitlements to prescription and specification details. Therefore, practitioners should ensure they understand and comply with rules and guidance on this issue.

More information

The GOC outlines the requirements for supplying contact lenses online in its 'Statement on the sale and supply of optical appliances' (30 October 2006). This statement is available from the GOC website www.optical.org

Detailed guidance is also available from the College of Optometrists and Association of British Dispensing Opticians.

See page 10 for OCCS advice on dealing with similar complaints.

Montague Levy: a tribute

The GOC's oldest registrant, Montague Levy, has sadly passed away. He was 88.

Montague featured in *Bulletin* back in Autumn 2006, staking his claim as the oldest registrant to have completed all his CET points. He also featured in the GOC's 50th anniversary publication, reflecting on some of the changes he had experienced in optics over the last 50 years.

Montague devoted his life to optometry, and began his career as an apprentice to an optician in 1935. Montague qualified in 1943, having studied at Northampton Polytechnic evening classes. Following a period of service in the RAF, Montague worked for some years at the London Refraction Hospital in the orthoptic and contact lens clinics. More recently, he enjoyed engaging with patients up to four days a week at a private practice in Camden, north west London.

Got a view?

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

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Have you read the online 2008-9 GOC Annual Report?
Do you want to receive future annual reports online?
Tell us what you think at: <http://annualreport08-09.optical.org/feedback>