

bulletin

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Registrants enjoy CET success

by Clare Millington

GOC registrants ended 2006 on a high note, with 90 per cent of all practitioners meeting their points requirement for Continuing Education and Training (CET) by the 31 December deadline. Figures for the end of the first CET cycle show that 95 per cent of optometrists, 89 per cent of dispensing opticians and 85 per cent of contact lens specialists earned and confirmed their full points requirement.

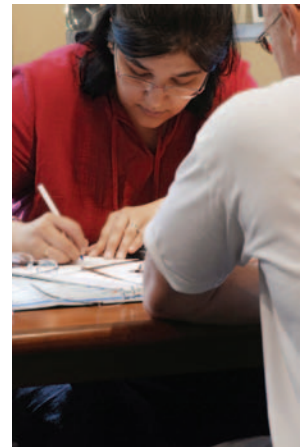
Registrants who failed to earn and verify enough CET points received warning letters in early January. They have until 15 March 2007 to make up the shortfall or face removal from the register. As the final deadline approaches, the number of practitioners who have not met the requirement continues to fall. Of the 1,554 registrants in shortfall on 31 December, over 260 had achieved the requirement by the end of January. A further 105 successfully registered on www.cetoptics.com, bringing the total who had failed to register with the website down to just 297, or 1.8 per cent of registrants. Of the group still in shortfall, around 76 per cent of optometrists, 72 per cent

“There is still plenty of CET available if you need to make up points. But time is running out for anyone with a significant deficit.”

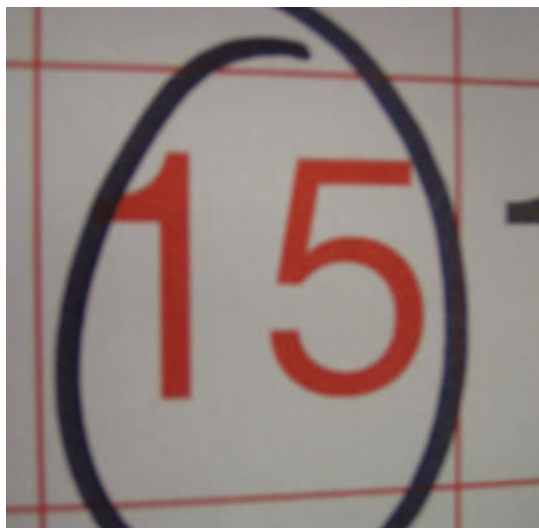
of dispensing opticians and 87 per cent of contact lens opticians had already earned more than 24 points.

Registrar Peter Coe is urging those with insufficient points to act now: “There is still plenty of CET available if you need to make up points. But time is running out for anyone with a significant deficit. There won't be any extension of the deadline. If you haven't earned and confirmed enough points, you will be removed on 1 April.”

Anyone who applies for retention but fails to meet the CET requirement will be removed from the register and their retention fee will be refunded after 1 April. Where a shortfall relates to a specialty only, the registrant's name will be removed



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Don't forget 15 March

The GOC is reminding all full registrants to return their completed retention applications as soon as possible. Practitioners who miss the 15 March deadline for renewal face removal from the register on 1 April.

Registrar Peter Coe stressed that all registrants, even those who pay by direct debit, must complete, sign and return the retention form to renew their registration.

Anyone who does not return their completed form and payment or who does not meet the CET requirement will be removed from the register on 1 April, irrespective of payment. The list of registrants not renewed will be published on the Council website, and copies sent to Primary Care Trusts.

Any registrant who did not receive their forms should contact the GOC to make sure their address details are up to date. The registration team can be contacted on 020 7580 3898, option 1, or email superinfo@optical.org.

In this issue

Registration focus:
a licence to practise

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Who's who on Council

Retinal screening
and optometrists

New lay members on Council

“The newcomers to the Council, both elected and appointed, have a huge contribution to make at a very significant time for the professions and for regulation.”

Three new lay members have been appointed to the General Optical Council. Morag Alexander, Ian Hamer and Sheila Wild have all been appointed for a five-year term starting in January 2007.

Rosie Varley, chairman of the GOC said, “I am absolutely delighted with the exceptional quality of the three individuals who have been appointed. The GOC is entering a very important new phase. The newcomers to the Council, both elected and appointed, have a huge contribution to make at a very significant time for the professions and for regulation.”

Morag Alexander OBE joins as the member for Scotland. She is currently convener of the Scottish Social Services Council, from which she will retire in the summer.

Ian Hamer OBE is appointed as the member for Wales. Formerly the chair of the Air Transport Users Council, Ian brings experience of representing the interests of consumers in a regulated environment.

Sheila Wild will serve as member for the English

constituency. She is director of employment policy at the Equal Opportunities Commission, where she has worked for over twenty-five years.

Who's on Council?

9 lay members

6 elected optometrists

5 elected dispensing opticians

4 nominees from the examining, training and professional bodies

4 nominees from the Royal College of Ophthalmologists

See pages 4-5 for profiles of the elected members

From the editor – meet the members

This issue we kick off a series of special features to ‘meet the members’. Elected members have answered the ‘Bulletin Questionnaire’ – designed to reveal a whole new side to the professions’ leaders. Find out who’s looking on the bright side, who’d like to be dining with Jesus – and who won’t be joining in with any GOC team-building away days!

Elsewhere we’ve included a focus on the crucial work of the Registration Committee from deputy chairman Geoff Harris, analysis of recent Fitness to Practise hearings from director of legal and FTP, Caroline Withall, and much more.

If you’d like to meet the team in person, our Council meetings are open to the public, and a great opportunity for registrants to find out more about our work. The GOC will also be at Optrafair this year. And the student roadshows will continue this Autumn.

See you there!

Kate Fielding, Editor



Rosie Varley, GOC chairman

New faces, new challenges:

A message from the chairman

The new year has marked the beginning of an exciting and challenging period for the GOC. Our new professional members took up their offices in January. As chairman, I am privileged to be working with an excellent member team, both old and new. Certainly we will need plenty of energy and ideas as a Council to tackle the challenges ahead.

The Continuing Education and Training scheme is now entering its second cycle. I congratulate everyone who has worked hard to achieve and surpass their CET requirement by the end of last year. We will need to ensure that the scheme continues to develop so that it is relevant and useful for all practising dispensing opticians and optometrists, including specialists. I will continue to argue for the departments of health to provide funding and support for dispensing opticians’ CET activities.

Following the government’s reviews of medical and non-medical healthcare regulation last year, it is likely that each of the healthcare regulators will be asked to move ahead with key reforms. The GOC has already laid much of the groundwork for professional revalidation to be developed from the strength and success of our CET scheme. The steps we have already taken to separate investigation and hearings functions, and to introduce student registration will also give us a head start.

Demographic changes, and technological and clinical advances will all provide opportunities and challenges for eye care. As the professions develop and take on new roles, the Council must continue to safeguard the high professional standards of optometry and dispensing optics and ensure that changes provide public health benefits and maintain patient safety.

I hope that 2007 will see us build on the very effective partnerships we have with the other optical and regulatory bodies, and continue to improve the relationship we have with registrants. This year we will redesign and relaunch the GOC website to make it more useful and usable for all our visitors. And of course, we will continue to publish the *Bulletin* to keep you up to date with the main news and events.

Best wishes.



Licensed to practise

Geoffrey Harris, deputy chairman of Council and chair of the Registration Committee, highlights the challenges of maintaining efficient and cost-effective registration.



Geoffrey Harris

Maintaining the Opticians Register is at the heart of the GOC's work. For optometrists and dispensing opticians carrying out regulated tasks, entry into the Register is the professional licence to practise. For all practitioners, registration is also a validation of competence and a commitment to maintaining standards.

The Registration Committee oversees this function to ensure some key outcomes. Each entry must be accurate, concise yet complete, up to date and managed in accordance with relevant legislation. Information needs to be collected, collated and validated effectively and efficiently. And the Register must be easily accessible to the public, yet secure and reliable.

As the scope of optometrists' and dispensing opticians' work grows, more information is needed to validate their competence and fitness to practise. One recent new element is Continuing Education and Training (CET). The optical professions have one of the most advanced mandatory CET schemes of all the healthcare professions. Managed by Vantage Technologies and using a contemporary online system, the GOC's CET programme enables some 17,000 practitioners to record and manage their CET. All but a few practitioners successfully submitted a satisfactory record at the end of the first cycle in December.

The Registration Committee will continue to oversee the CET

scheme and to drive its future development through the CET Audit Group and the CET Advisory Panel. Their work is informed by other committees, particularly Education and Standards, and input from the optical professions. Ideas for consideration include moving to a rolling three-year cycle; the inclusion of an explicit element of professional development alongside core education and training; and further assuring and enhancing standards within the scheme.

In another key area, the GOC is likely to face substantial new legal obligations arising from the reports into Harold Shipman and Ian Huntley. Healthcare regulators, along with employers, police and other agencies, will have a duty to provide relevant information about anyone whose work may entail contact with children or vulnerable adults. We may need to gather more information about registrants' character, in addition to the current process for disclosure at registration or renewal, and make changes to the way we validate and manage information.

Looking ahead, the need for registration systems and processes to manage information about registrants accurately and efficiently seems certain to grow, and to become more complex and demanding. Creating and implementing systems with the capacity and capability to meet our requirements will mean further changes. But the optical professions can take pride in their regulatory leadership and in having a regulatory body which has sound and effective systems in place to keep it, and the professions it regulates, at the leading edge of healthcare regulatory practice. Our aim is, and will remain, to protect the public and maintain professional standards which are relevant, enforceable and proportionate.

GOC highlights patient safety in Europe



Photos: Jan Chlebik

The General Optical Council has joined forces with other UK regulators to call for new laws on disclosure in Europe.

In a joint response to the European Commission's consultation, *Community Action on Health Services*, the Alliance of UK Health Regulators on Europe (AURE) propose a new legal duty on regulatory bodies across Europe to exchange disciplinary and registration information about healthcare professionals and to act on it.

GOC registrar and chief executive Peter Coe explains: "High levels of mobility bring benefits for both patients and professionals. But we are concerned that a minority will exploit free movement rights and put patients at risk. We need a better system in place to test fitness to practise and language skills and to flag up practitioners considered to be a danger to patients. If European optical regulators are required to share registration and disciplinary information, we will be much better placed to ensure the safety of patients and the public."

In 2005, over 7000 practitioners from the European Economic Area came to the UK to register with AURE's members and find work.

In Brief – news from Council

Fees fixed for 2007/8

For the fourth consecutive year, there will be no increase in registration fees. The decision was taken at the November meeting of the General Optical Council. Fees for 2007/8 remain at £169 for registration, £239 for restoration and £20 for student registration. Newly-qualified registrants will benefit from a pro-rata fee for their first registration year – for more information, see page 8.

Consumer complaints tender on hold

The tender process for sourcing a consumer complaints service provider has been postponed pending the outcome of a Department of Health consultation which could result in a single complaints process across health and social care, and would impact on consumer complaints procedures. In the interim, a 12-month contract extension has been awarded to the current providers, OCCS.

New Council members

Eleven newly-elected Council members took up their positions on 1 January 2007. Three new lay members were also appointed in January. Each member will serve for a period of five years. Committee membership for 2007/8 was finalised at the November meeting. Overall turnout in the elections was 20 per cent with a total of 3,322 votes cast out of a possible 16,247. See our feature on pages 4-5 for more information and profiles of the elected members.

Website strategy


Following Council's recommendation for a redesigned web site, members approved a new website strategy in November. Objectives for the site include increased accessibility for users, and the delivery of timely, accurate information. A consultation to find out what features and functions users would like from the GOC online is now underway.

Next meeting

The next meeting of Council will be at 10.30 on Thursday, 22 March 2007 in London. Council meetings are open to the public. If you would like to attend, please email echambers@optical.org.

Who's Who on Council?

Elected members take *'The Bulletin Questionnaire'*.



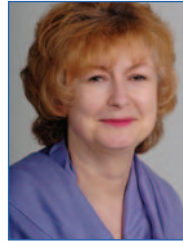
Name: **Charles Rodney Wass**
Age: **62**
Profession: **Optometrist**
Family: **Married to Janet (also an optometrist), two daughters**
Lives: **Manchester**

What is the biggest challenge for the GOC at the moment?
Understanding the problems of optometry, and promoting this understanding to the grass roots profession.

What has been your most rewarding moment as a professional?
Being asked to join the Optical Voucher Consultative Committee, after the death of an AOP councillor who was very kind and welcoming to me.

What is your idea of perfect happiness?
Socialising with family and friends on a warm summer's day, as I did for my surprise 60th birthday party.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?
Always look on the bright side - a bit of a cliché, but there are always others whose situation is much worse.




Name: **Kim Devlin**
Age: **51**
Profession: **Dispensing optician**
Family: **Single**
Lives: **Essex**

What is the biggest challenge for the GOC at the moment?
Adapting to a constantly changing world that does not treat professionals as it once did, for good or bad.

What has been your most rewarding moment as a professional?
Working on a VAO (Vision Aid Overseas) project in Ghana. Your skill and knowledge can help those with truly nothing, but who manage to laugh and enjoy life to the full.

Glasses or contact lenses?
Contact lenses 90 per cent of the time. My self image doesn't wear specs but I do when I slob out at home, or when I need a break for clinical reasons.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?
Seize the day – this is not a rehearsal, enjoy every moment.



Name: **Gwyneth Morgan**
Age: **47**
Profession: **Optometrist**
Family: **Yes, but not children**
Lives: **Cardiff**


What is the biggest challenge for the GOC at the moment?
Maintaining public protection whilst not crushing professions with disproportionate legislation.

Issues of maintaining equal standards in all regions of UK despite increasing differences in practice between regions. (And related issues of practice in UK subject to EU legislation.)

What has been your most rewarding moment as a professional?
Really solving someone's eye/vision problems when they had thought it insoluble.

What is your idea of perfect happiness?
Afloat at safe anchorage, sunset, the right crew around, gin and tonic in hand...

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?
Live every day as if it will be your last.



Name: **Keith Cavaye**
Age: **56**
Profession: **Independent contact lens optician and consultant**
Family: **Two children, optometrist partner Angela**
Lives: **In a peaceful Bucks village, Stoke Hammond**

What is the biggest challenge for the GOC at the moment?
Gaining and retaining the trust of the registrants.

What is your idea of perfect happiness?
Good health and a one week holiday.

What is your greatest fear?
Not finding enough time to do justice to this GOC position.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?
You probably can do it!

Glasses or contact lenses?
Like stilton and port, it has to be both.



Name: **Jennifer Brower**
Profession: **Dispensing optician and low vision practitioner**
Family: **Married to optometrist**
Lives: **Hertfordshire**

Roles and background?
Independent practice and the hospital eye service. ABDO board member, chairman of the low vision and London area committees, chairman of ABDO benevolent fund. GOC Council member since 2002.

What is the biggest challenge for the GOC at the moment?
The ageing population will result in more age-related eye disease, and greater demand for low vision services. We need to ensure the professions are prepared to meet the eye care needs of older people.

What are your priorities?
CET equality for CLOs and a properly-funded CET scheme. Unqualified dispensing, internet sales and sports eyewear are particular areas of concern. The omission of dispensing opticians from PCTs and local lists restricts the availability of optical services to the public, particularly in the field of low vision.



Name: **Nicholas Rumney**
 Age: **48**
 Profession: **Optometrist**
 Family: **Married, two children**
 Lives: **Hereford**
 Background: **Born on the day the GOC came into being (7 July, 1958)**

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

Planning for the consequences of the nation's eye health, if England and Northern Ireland do not follow the Scottish and Welsh lead.

What has been your most rewarding moment as a professional?

Being voted joint recipient of the 1996 *Optician* magazine Contribution to Optics award, and my first and second elections to the GOC.

What is your idea of perfect happiness?

Being back at Stadium Australia 22 Nov 2003. [rugby, apparently – Ed.]

What is your greatest fear?

Not being back at Stadium Anywhere 2007!

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

Pint glasses are always half full.



Name: **James Hanfield Russell**
 Age: **52**
 Profession: **Contact lens and dispensing optician**
 Family: **Married, no children**
 Lives: **Chartham, near Canterbury, Kent**

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

Creating a supportive environment for practitioners to practise the full range of their competencies with confidence, and to the public's benefit.

What has been your most rewarding moment as a professional?

Speaking from the Archbishop of Canterbury's pulpit at ABDO's diploma ceremony, Canterbury Cathedral.

Which person living or dead would you most like to have dinner with?

Charles Dickens (after my wife, of course!)

What is your greatest fear?

Intolerance and indifference.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

Do as you would be done by.



Name: **Roger Sproule Anderson**
 Age: **42**
 Profession: **Professor of optometry**
 Family: **Married, three children**
 Lives: **Coleraine**

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

To constantly respond to the changing whims of government.

What has been your most rewarding moment as a professional?

Publishing my first research paper; the feeling doesn't go away either.

Which person living or dead would you most like to have dinner with?

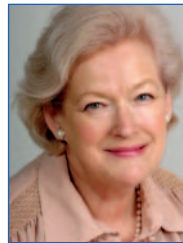
Sir Isaac Newton.

What is your greatest fear?

That my children will lose their freedom of conscience.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

You can't take it with you.



Name: **Rosemary Bailey**
 Age: **Presbyopia has arrived!**
 Profession: **Contact lens optician/meeting attendee**
 Family: **Single – one aunt, one goddaughter**
 Lives: **Berkshire**

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

Balancing its role of public protection with its regulatory responsibilities.

What has been your most rewarding moment as a professional?

Bringing about a change in comfort and/or vision by fitting and supplying a contact lens – and the unique relationship which ensues between wearer and practitioner.

Which person living or dead would you most like to have dinner with?

Michael Palin – the traveller not the comedian!

What is your greatest fear?

The GOC sending me on a team building day that includes walking across a high wire (I don't like looking down from a great height!)



Name: **Donald Cameron**
 Age: **53**
 Profession: **Optometrist**
 Family: **Married, two grown-up children**
 Lives: **Edinburgh**

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

Getting meaningful, safe, progressive therapeutic legislation on the statute book.

Which person living or dead would you most like to have dinner with?

Jesus of Nazareth at age 27.

What is your greatest fear?

Having to attend a GOC Fitness to Practise panel hearing.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

Academic prowess has nothing to do with wisdom, so wisdom should be sought above all else.



Name: **David Cartwright**
 Age: **49**
 Profession: **Optometrist**
 Family: **Married to Yvonne, also a practising optometrist, with two children**
 Lives: **Woodborough, Nottinghamshire**

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

Gaining compliance with the regulation for the sale of spectacles and contact lenses to ensure public safety.

What has been your most rewarding moment as a professional?

A newly qualified dispensing optician was delighted with her career choice, and thanked me for giving her the initial encouragement to undertake the course.

What is your idea of perfect happiness?

A family holiday, good weather, camping near a Cornish surfing beach.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

Stick to what you think makes sense and do not be swayed by others.

Hearings report

Director of Legal and Fitness to Practise, *Caroline Withall*, reviews the recent cases.

The autumn GOC hearings saw some significant decisions being made by the Fitness to Practise panel. In October the Committee heard the case of **Darren Bedford**, a dispensing optician. Mr Bedford's fitness to practise was initially questioned as a result of a police caution for theft from his employer. Mr Bedford sold merchandise from the practice on eBay. As a result of the GOC investigation, it also came to light that Mr Bedford dispensed spectacles to under 16s unsupervised, and dispensed contact lenses when he was not qualified to do so. Both acts are offences under the Opticians Act. Mr Bedford admitted the charges and was found guilty of misconduct. His fitness to practise was found to be impaired and he was erased from the register. The panel's finding was notable for the decision to uphold a police caution as a serious impairment to fitness to practise.

The case of **Robert Frith** also sent a clear message to registrants – in this matter Mr Frith was found guilty of deficient professional performance for his failure to perform a visual fields test on a patient with a family history of glaucoma. There was also a finding of deficient record keeping. These decisions are important as they indicate the significance of the recommended tests and practice in the College of Optometrists' guidelines. It is very significant that there is now a fitness to practise decision which enforces the principle of thorough record keeping.

The GOC also saw its first conditional registrant. **Nathan Ryan**, a dispensing optician, was found guilty of misconduct for use of a class A drug. The panel imposed a two-year conditional registration on Mr Ryan, which included supervised practice and regular drug testing. It will be interesting to see if conditional registration becomes more prevalent in the fitness to practise panels' decision making.

At a restoration hearing in November, registration was refused to **Ashim Parti** following his removal in December 2000 for inadequate sight testing and poor record keeping.

The Committee were not satisfied that Mr Parti had addressed the concerns raised by the original findings or that he could be trusted to uphold standards in the profession in the future. This decision illustrates the robustness of the fitness to practise panel in ensuring that the good reputation of the profession is upheld.

Finally the Council sought an Interim Order against a student registrant, **Harbhajan Singh**. Mr Singh is the subject of a police investigation following an allegation from a patient of inappropriate conduct. The Committee were satisfied that the only way to protect members of the public and serve the public interest was by ordering an immediate interim suspension for twelve months.



Photo: Jan Chlebik

OBE for Chairman

General Optical Council chairman Rosie Varley has been awarded an OBE in the Queen's New Year's Honours List. The honour is in recognition of her services to the NHS and to healthcare.

"I will continue to do all I can to gain greater government recognition of the critical role of the optical professions in improving peoples' health and quality of life."

The New Year's Honours List reflects and pays tribute to outstanding achievement and service across the community.

Commenting on the award, Rosie said: "I was overwhelmed when I heard I was to receive this award, which was entirely unexpected. During the thirty years that I have been involved with healthcare I have had the privilege to work with an enormous number of talented and dedicated people. My various roles have all, in different ways, focused on providing a framework within which front line clinicians can deliver excellent patient care, and this honour is an acknowledgement of the achievements of all those people.

"My involvement with the world of optics over the last eight years has been enormously rewarding, and I will continue to do all I can to gain greater government recognition of the critical role of the optical professions in improving peoples' health and quality of life."

In addition to her role as chairman of the GOC, Rosie Varley is a regional commissioner of the NHS Appointments Commission until March 2007 and has recently been appointed to the Public Guardian Board at the Home Office.



Rosie Varley

Registrants enjoy CET success

(continued from page 1)

from the relevant specialty register. Specialty registration cannot be maintained if a practitioner does not earn and confirm enough general points – for example, a contact lens optician who has earned enough contact lens points, but has a shortfall of general points will be removed from both the DO and CL registers.

New cycle

Practitioners are being encouraged to plan ahead for the second CET cycle. Running from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2009, the new cycle is governed by revised principles and requirements. A copy of the principles document is available from the GOC website - www.optical.org.

Changes include a more flexible definition of the learning hour, more flexible approval criteria for peer review and more points for workshops. Providers will also be asked to give more information about the level of CET events, to help registrants plan and attend more relevant training.

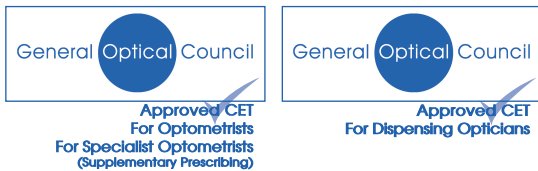
Registrants are urged to try to achieve a cross-section of competencies and modalities.

Make sure your CET is approved for your target group.

Practitioners can only earn points from CET events which have been approved for their 'target group'. For example, a dispensing optician will not be awarded points for attending CET approved only for optometrists. If an event is approved for both general and specialist points, a specialist will be able to choose which type of points they would like to be credited with when they accept the points on www.cetoptics.com. (New functionality should be in place in the next few weeks.)

Providers should make it clear in any advertising or publicity material which target group(s) the CET has been approved for. Look out for the new logos – some examples are printed here. You can also check the target groups for any event on the CET Directory on www.cetoptics.com which includes a quick reference system with symbols showing the relevant target groups.

Look out for the new logos:



Target group symbols in the CET Directory

Members retire at 69-3

Bob Chappell salutes an impressive innings.

At its November meeting the Council bade a formal farewell to three GOC stalwarts. Dick Roberts, John Baker and John Fried had amassed an amazing 69 years of service between them.

All three joined the Council at a time of radical change for the professions in the 1980s. They have lived through many storms – some of them brewed within the GOC and others blown in our direction by politicians. To their credit, all of them have been in the vanguard for change. They have not argued for change for the sake of change or change driven by political ideology, but change which is proportionate to what we do and serves to protect and benefit the public. They continue to do so.

Dick Roberts is the longest serving member, having notched up 25 years. He has served in many roles, but it is chairing the Investigation Committee for 20 years which marks his greatest contribution to Council. As if his work for the GOC was not enough, he has been heavily involved in the development of the Wales Eye Care Initiative which was a watershed in the development of primary eye care in the UK.

John Baker joined the Council 24 years ago. A distinguished member of the dispensing optics profession, his friendly nature and willingness to see the other's point of view has been of enormous value to the GOC. John's vast experience of the disciplinary work of the Council spanned most of his terms of office. He also represented his profession on the Optical Services Audit Committee (OSAC) which was to be the foundation of recent legislative changes.

John Fried was persuaded to stand for Council after complaining about the state of optics and being told to 'stop



John Fried, John Baker and Dick Roberts

talking and do something about it'. John will tell you that he is not a politician and can't string two words together. The Council knows better. For 20 years, his down to earth approach has made many see life as it is, and he has combined professional opinion with public protection – not always an easy task.

The Council, profession and the public they serve are indeed fortunate to have benefited from their long and loyal service.

Photo: Cardiff University

Practitioner perspective



Trevor Warburton

Trevor Warburton is an optometrist. He is chairman of the AOP and a member of the UK National Screening Committee's retinopathy screening project board.

The targets for retinal screening in England mean that all 100 or so proposed digital screening programmes ought to be up and running very soon. It is estimated that a third or more of these will have some degree of optometry involvement.

Anyone involved with capturing and grading images or with slit lamp BIO within a screening programme will need to undertake the relevant City & Guilds certificate modules to demonstrate their competency, including optometrists and ophthalmologists.

Although the clinical skills are included within the GOC core competencies, some of these skills may need refreshing in order to apply them in the required manner. Practitioners will also need to learn to use the specific local screening software and grading protocols.

The screening software will allow detailed analysis of an individual's grading performance which can be monitored and fed back to practitioners. Being overseen to this degree, together with the practical assessment of skills by workplace assessors, is likely to be alien to most optometrists – though it is not unknown elsewhere in the NHS. Far from fearing this process, we should welcome it as a means of improving our performance through feedback.

There have been screening scandals in other clinical areas through lack of adequate monitoring and none of us would wish to be a practitioner responsible for missing sight-threatening eye disease. Nevertheless, practitioners involved with these schemes should be under no illusions – you will be monitored to an extent you have never experienced before!

Pro rata fees for new registrants

From 1 April 2007, newly-qualified optometrists and dispensing opticians will benefit from a pro-rata policy on registration fees.

Under the new fees rules, approved by the Council in November, student optometrists and dispensing opticians joining the full register are no longer automatically required to pay the full £169 registration fee, irrespective of the date of registration. Instead, they will pay a proportionate fee, calculated from the date of joining to the end of the registration year, on 31 March.

The fee will be £42.25 for every period of three whole calendar months in their first year on the full register. The standard renewal fee will then be due by the annual retention deadline of 15 March.

For any student joining the full register up to 31 March 2006, the 2005/6 Registration Fees Rules apply. Further details including registration fees and forms are available from the GOC website, www.optical.org

Pro rata fees from 1 April – how does it work?

If you register between	You need to pay
1 April – 30 June	£169
1 July – 30 September	£126.75 (£ 42.25 x 3)
1 October – 31 December	£ 84.50 (£ 42.25 x 2)
1 January – 31 March	£ 42.25

Government regulation review

The GOC responded to the government's review of healthcare professional regulation in November last year.

The Council warned that differences between systems for regulating medical and non-medical professionals would undermine efforts to introduce greater consistency between regulators. However, it argued for proportionality in regulation, to recognise differences in size, practice settings and risk among the different professions.

The response also supported proposals to change the 'culture' of regulation, through a greater emphasis on supporting good standards of practice, including provision for retraining and rehabilitation where problems arise.

An announcement is expected soon from the Department of Health detailing changes to regulation frameworks. These may include changes to regulatory bodies' governance, investigation and adjudication procedures and revalidation requirements for healthcare professionals.

Update for *Opticians' Handbook*

An updated and extended *Opticians' Handbook* is now available to all registered optometrists, dispensing opticians and students. The handbook, now in its second edition, has been revised to include the complete set of current GOC rules, and the full text of the amended Opticians Act. The Handbook also includes the codes of conduct for individual and business registrants.

All registrants were sent a handbook in 2005, and those registering with the GOC for the first time automatically receive a copy of the new handbook in their registration pack.

Existing registrants can buy additional copies for £5 each. Cheques should be made payable to 'General Optical Council' and sent to: Georgina Devoy, General Optical Council, 41 Harley Street, London W1G 8DJ.

Got a view?

Have your say by emailing us at

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