

GOC celebrates golden anniversary

By Clare Millington

1958
2008

"This is a milestone for both the GOC and the optical professions."

This month the General Optical Council celebrates its 50th birthday. On 7 July 2008 it will be 50 years to the day since the beginning of statutory regulation for optometrists and dispensing opticians, as created by the Opticians Act.

To mark the anniversary, Council members past and present, along with optical bodies, charities, and other partner organisations, will gather in London to commemorate the Council's achievements.

Commenting on the occasion, GOC chairman Rosie Varley said: "This is a milestone for both the GOC and the optical professions. Optical regulation has changed significantly over the past half-century, to keep pace with clinical developments in optometry and dispensing optics, and the settings in which eyecare is provided. Both professions have come a long way from the early days, and continue to grow and adapt. Their capacity to modernise has ensured that the UK public receives a high standard of eyecare. The flexibility and forward-looking approach of the sector will put us in a strong position to deliver the next phase of reforms."

Peter Coe added: "It is important to recognise and celebrate the hard work and collaborative partnerships that have enabled Council to deliver its mission of public protection since its creation 50 years ago. I am confident that with the valued support and expertise of registrants, members, partners and staff, we are well equipped to deal with the challenges ahead."

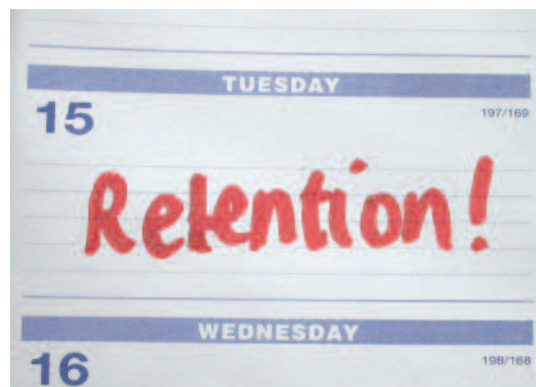
Read more about the GOC - past, present and future - on pages 6-7.

Students: retention deadline 15 July

The GOC is issuing a warning to all registered students who have not yet applied for retention: get your application in now or risk removal from the registers on 1 September. Students must complete and return their retention form, together with £20 payment, by 15 July.

Registration with the GOC is a legal requirement for everyone studying a GOC-approved course of training in optometry or dispensing optics. Those who pay now but decide not to continue with their course in September will receive a full refund. Pre-registration students who renew now, but join the full register by 31 August will have their full registration fee reduced by £20.

Students who have not received their application form should contact the registration team on 020 7580 3898 (option 1), or download a copy from the website, www.optical.org.



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UK Vision Strategy explained

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New plans for equality and diversity monitoring

Deputy registrar steps up as acting CEO



Dian Taylor

From July 2008 Dian Taylor will become acting chief executive and registrar at the GOC. Currently deputy registrar, Dian will take over the reins following Peter Coe's retirement this Summer.

Recruitment for a permanent chief executive will take place once the new chairman of Council

is appointed later this year. At their March meeting in Belfast, members expressed their unanimous support for the decision to ask Dian Taylor to lead the GOC during the period of transition to a new Council.

Current chairman Rosie Varley welcomed the appointment: "The Council has full confidence in Dian's ability to provide the steady hand and leadership the GOC needs during this phase of change. Her sound

judgement, experience and knowledge will be invaluable to members, staff and partner organisations."

Commenting on her new role, Dian said: "There is a **"...Her sound judgement, experience and knowledge will be invaluable to members, staff and partner organisations."**

huge task ahead. Both the optical and health regulation sectors are undergoing significant changes. Peter Coe has done a great job in ensuring the GOC has the foundations in place to meet these challenges and deliver a programme of reform. I'm looking forward to taking that work forward, and I will strive to maintain the good relationships we have with our partner organisations."

Dian brings a wealth of experience to the role, having worked for the GOC since 1989. Prior to that she worked for the Royal College of General Practitioners as head of the Central Secretariat.

Message from the Editor

Birthdays are often a time for celebrating the present and reflecting on the past. The GOC's golden anniversary is no different.

Over the last half-century, the optical professions have achieved much to be proud of, from fighting to establish statutory regulation in the 1950s, to the opportunities available today for increased scope of practice.

In my first issue of *Bulletin* as Editor I've tried to reflect that birthday mix of reflection and celebration. And by way of a birthday treat for you, it's a bumper 12-page edition. We report on the UK's first ever Vision Strategy, take a look at how the latest CET figures are stacking up, and get the lowdown on proposals for a new equality and diversity monitoring scheme. We also look back on 50 years of statutory regulation, and meet the oldest and youngest registrant.

I'm always keen to hear your views and suggestions for improving *Bulletin*. If you have any comments get in touch by emailing me at bulletin@optical.org

Enjoy the summer, wherever you're spending it, and we'll be back towards the end of 2008.

Clare Millington, Editor.



Peter Coe

Message from the Registrar

Birthdays have been much on my mind, of late. This issue celebrates the GOC achieving its 50th anniversary. No doubt to those who struggled for nearly 60 years from the turn of the 20th century to

set it up, that would seem a remarkable achievement.

I have been around just a little longer than the GOC, and so my thoughts have also turned to my own 60th birthday this Summer (incidentally, shared with the NHS). It will be a significant occasion for me both personally and professionally, as I will retire as the GOC's chief executive and registrar.

People and organisations alike need to take the opportunity of these anniversaries to reflect on the past, take stock of the present, and look ahead to the future. We need to avoid becoming outdated or irrelevant as the world moves on around us.

The GOC has a great deal to be proud of. Since its creation, it has striven to ensure a robust, proportionate system of optical regulation, which has served and protected the public, and enhanced the standing and scope of practice of the optical professions. It has often been an innovator, and has had the strength both to lead the field and to stand alone on some issues.

Yet it is the partnerships the GOC has built which I believe represent its greatest legacy to date. I hope that I have been able to make some small contribution to these achievements.

As it reaches its half century, the GOC stands on a cusp. In 2009, a new Council will take up office. They will need to ensure that the changes being made now make the GOC fit for purpose as it starts its next 50 years.

Few of us can expect to be here to celebrate the Council's centenary. But I believe that at this critical moment, the GOC deserves to be led by someone who will be able to see through a programme of reform which may last several years.

Dian Taylor, who has been my deputy throughout my time here, and who has the confidence of the Council, will step up as registrar until my successor is appointed.

I wish her, and all the GOC staff, Council members, partner bodies and registrants well. I have been privileged to work with many talented and dedicated people at the GOC, and to have had the support of our colleagues at both the optical and regulatory bodies. It is people who are the strength of any organisation, and that is why the GOC can face the future with confidence.

Peter Coe

Coe plans future digging into the past

GOC registrar and chief executive *Peter Coe* announced in March that he would retire this Summer on reaching his sixtieth birthday.

During seven and a half years with the organisation, he has made a big impression. Peter guided through the programme of legislative reform that introduced key changes in 2005, including the introduction of CET, student registration and independent hearings panels, as well as the independent prescribing of medicines, and strengthened partnerships across Europe.

“...There has been wide acknowledgement of his contribution, and in particular of his open style, which has transformed the GOC’s relationships with partner organisations.”

Peter is looking forward to some new and exciting personal challenges. Though he plans to continue his involvement in health and regulation, he intends to balance this with studying for an MA in archaeology: “It will be a wrench to leave the GOC, but I believe it is the right time to hand over to those who will see through the next phase of development. I am extremely fortunate to have an opportunity to explore some new avenues and fulfil a long-held personal ambition.”

Chairman Rosie Varley paid tribute to his achievements: “We are very sorry to see Peter go. He has done a great job at the GOC building the foundations for our current programme of reform. There has been wide acknowledgement of his contribution, and in particular of his open style, which has transformed the GOC’s relationships with partner organisations.”

Opticians removed for failing to renew

On 1 April, the GOC removed a total of 442 opticians from its registers for failing to renew their 2008/9 registration. Included in the total were 184 optometrists, 179 dispensing opticians and 79 bodies corporate.



Removals were down from last year, which saw 652 registrants (including 50 bodies corporate) removed from the register. Peter Coe, GOC registrar stressed: “Registration is not a trivial issue – it is a fundamental requirement, and part of the Code of Conduct. Around 98 per cent of registrants have shown their commitment and professionalism by responding to the deadline without any difficulty. Those who have been removed from the registers are not eligible to work, and we have informed employers and NHS trusts.”

The list of registrants not renewed for 2008-9 was sent to primary care organisations and the professional bodies in April. To date, 146 opticians have restored to the registers.

To practise in the UK, optometrists and dispensing opticians must be GOC registered. Bodies corporate who are not appropriately registered may not use or associate any of the protected titles (such as ‘optometrist’, ‘dispensing optician’, ‘registered optician’, ‘ophthalmic optician’) with their company names.

Those restoring to the registers must complete an application for restoration form, pay the restoration fee and provide evidence of having completed the required minimum of CET in the past 12 months. Restoration forms are available from the GOC website www.optical.org, from the registration team on 020 7580 3898, or by emailing superinfo@optical.org.

In Brief – news from Council

No change to CET in next cycle

At its March meeting, Council accepted the recommendation made by the CET Policy and Development Group that no changes would be made to the current CET scheme. The decision follows the GOC’s open consultation on the future of CET post 2010.

Election of deputy chairman and treasurer

Members re-elected Geoff Harris and Moira Black as deputy chairman and treasurer, respectively. The deputy chairman’s duties involve presiding over Council meetings in the absence of the chairman. The treasurer supervises the income and expenditure of Council.

Temporary and occasional registration within the EU

Council noted the introduction of two new registers for temporary and occasional registration of qualified practitioners from the EU/ EEA. Optometrists and dispensing opticians, including those from the UK, can now register to work in other European countries on a temporary and occasional basis, providing they meet certain criteria. The registers have been established in response to the EU Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications, which came into force last year.

Next meeting

The next meeting of Council will take place at 10.30 on Thursday 3 July in London. Council meetings are open to the public. If you would like to attend please email nford@optical.org

UK Vision Strategy – leading the way for eye health and sight loss services

In April this year, the first ever UK Vision Strategy was launched. *Lesley-Anne Alexander*, chief executive of the RNIB explains how registrants can help bring the strategy to life.

“It’s only by working together across the eye health and sight loss sector that we stand a chance of transforming services in the UK.”



Lesley-Anne Alexander

The UK Vision Strategy is a Vision 2020 initiative, led by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB). It aims to: radically improve the eye health of the nation; eliminate avoidable sight loss; improve services to people with sight loss; and increase inclusion in society for blind and partially-sighted people.

The Strategy calls for reliable, accessible and relevant information on eye conditions, eyecare, sight loss services, support networks and legal entitlements to be made readily available. This will enable the public to make informed decisions about their eye health.

Professionals from health, social care and the voluntary sector, and those with experience of eye health and sight loss services, were involved in developing the Strategy. This cross-

sector approach will be instrumental in moving the Strategy from the page into practice.

As the first point of contact for eyecare advice, opticians are in a strong position to help the nation understand the importance of eye health. As a way of promoting eyecare and low vision services, practitioners could help build more effective local networks and eye health forums. These groups might involve local commissioners, other healthcare professionals and patients. Crucially, eyecare services should be person-centred, creating a seamless pathway through health, social care and the voluntary sector.

It’s only by working together across the eye health and sight loss sector that we stand a chance of transforming services in the UK - we’ve made an important start.

To find out more about the Strategy visit:

www.rnib.org.uk/ukvisionstrategy, www.vision2020uk.org.uk or read the *Guardian’s* ‘Society’ supplement at www.societyguardian.co.uk/visionofthefuture.

Lesley-Anne Alexander is chair of the advisory group that led the development of the UK Vision Strategy.

GOC teams up with BCLA to promote safe contact lens purchase



The GOC has given its backing to a leaflet which aims to educate consumers about buying and wearing contact lenses. *Buying Contact Lenses* deals with common questions and answers around lens purchase.

It points out that only registered optometrists, dispensing opticians with a registered contact lens specialty and medical practitioners can fit contact lenses, and outlines the law on selling lenses.

Peter Coe, GOC registrar said: “We want to make sure the public are able to make well-informed consumer choices. This leaflet should help practitioners talk to contact lens wearers about their options for buying lenses, what the law says, and how they can keep their eyes healthy by having proper fittings and aftercare.”

The leaflet was launched at the BCLA clinical conference in May. During a round-table discussion on the risks to patients of general sale of contact lenses, it emerged that some practitioners may still be confused about the legal requirements.

“Optometrists and dispensing opticians who are supervising or generally directing sales of contact lenses must make sure they are up to date with the professional guidance,” Coe said.

Revised professional guidance was issued last year by the College of Optometrists and ABDO. Plano lenses can only be sold by, or under the supervision of, a qualified practitioner. The supervisor must be on the premises, aware of the procedure and in a position to intervene if necessary to ensure that no untoward consequences to the detriment of the patient can arise.

“This leaflet should help practitioners to talk to contact lens wearers about their options for buying lenses, what the law says, and how they can keep their eyes healthy by having proper fittings and aftercare.”

Drive to regulate sales in Europe

Practitioners are being asked to report adverse incidents concerning contact lenses (including plano lenses) and the regulatory conditions under which they were purchased. The CLEER (Contact Lens European Evidence Reporting) Project, was launched on 1 June. It will run for one year and will provide data to support efforts to regulate the supply of contact lenses across Europe.

For more information, or to submit a case, visit the website at www.CLEER-project.eu.

Call for case studies

If you have any case histories of contact lens wearers who have experienced eye problems as a result of buying contact lenses without having seen an optician, please contact the BCLA on 020 7580 6661. The case studies are needed for a consumer awareness campaign planned for this Summer.

Professional guidance: what is it for?

Grahame Tinsley, GOC Assistant Director of Standards explains how the professional guidance benefits you and your patients.

Why is professional guidance necessary?

Professional guidance exists so that optometrists, dispensing opticians, students and optical businesses know what is expected of them. The optical bodies, including the GOC, produce principles of good practice and conduct to ensure patients receive consistent, high-quality eyecare. Practitioners are bound to follow the principles outlined in the GOC codes of conduct. These include being familiar with, and understanding, relevant guidance.

The GOC refers to the guidance in its dealings with registrants and in day to day activities, for example when considering complaints from the public about a registrant's fitness to practise. Fresh or amended guidance is issued as and when changes occur.

Council keeps all professional guidance and advice under review.

What guidance is available?

The main sources are:

- The College of Optometrists: *Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct*
- The Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO): *Advice and Guidelines on Professional Conduct for Dispensing Opticians*
- The GOC produces codes of conduct for both individual and business registrants.
- The Association of Optometrists (AOP) and the Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians (FODO) publish advice and guidance on a range of practice issues.

Where can I access it?

It's all available online. Visit:

- www.college-optometrists.org
- www.assoc-optometrists.org
- www.abdo.org.uk
- www.fodo.com
- www.optical.org

Why is professional guidance important?

Effective, safe treatment can only be delivered if registrants are aware of: professional and regulatory matters; expected standards of conduct and ethics; and training and practice issues.

Elaine Grisdale, ABDO head of professional services and principal examiner in professional conduct, stressed: "Dispensing opticians should check the advice and guidance even if they do not have an immediate problem. It could save them having an issue in the future."

New forms of optical practice are also highlighted. For example, the College of Optometrists is currently preparing guidance on supplementary and independent prescribing. Dr Susan Blakeney, optometric adviser to the College of Optometrists, explains: "Optometry is broadening in scope, and the guidance acts as a first port-of-call for issues of professional judgement, clinical expertise and so on. It's designed to offer practical advice that helps optometrists deliver the best service they possibly can for the benefit of their patients."

What happens if I don't comply with the guidance?

Practitioners are expected to comply with the duties and responsibilities set out in the codes of conduct, and be familiar with the relevant guidance and advice issued by the professional and representative bodies. In the most serious cases a registrant may be taken off the register and unable to continue practising. Fundamentally, inadequate eyecare means the public are losing out.

Elaine Grisdale concluded: "For the many registrants who qualified a number of years ago, rules and regulations were not formally studied. They did not appear on an exam paper, and they certainly weren't the same as they are today. This means that potentially many practitioners may be out of date, and practising in a way that contravenes the law without realising it."

Still got a question?

For more information contact:

Elaine Grisdale, ABDO head of professional services, principal examiner in professional conduct:
egrisdale@abdo.org.uk

Dr Susan Blakeney, optometric adviser to the College of Optometrists: optometric.adviser@college-optometrists.org

Jon Levett, GOC director of standards: jlevett@optical.org

"Many practitioners may be out of date, and practising in a way that contravenes the law without realising it."

Independent prescribing speciality to be approved

By Jon Levett

Following recent changes to medicines legislation, the GOC will introduce a new speciality that will enable optometrists to independently prescribe medicines.

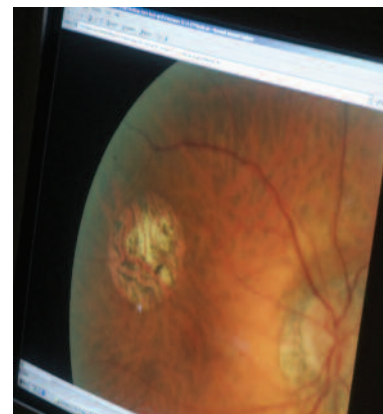
Under the new rules, optometrists who complete approved training in prescribing, and who can demonstrate that they have competence in the diagnosis and management of the conditions for which they intend to prescribe, will be able to have the speciality of 'independent prescribing' entered against their name on the Opticians Registers.

When acting as independent prescribers, optometrists will be fully responsible and accountable for the assessment of patients, and for decisions about the clinical management required for the treatment of ocular conditions, including the prescribing of medicines. The law will enable them to prescribe any licensed medicine affecting the eye or surrounding tissue.

In addition to gaining specialist CET in therapeutic prescribing, optometrists who are independent prescribers will have to demonstrate that they have adequate practical experience to maintain their registered speciality.

The College of Optometrists is preparing guidance for optometrists with prescribing specialties (both supplementary and independent prescribing). As with other guidance issued by professional bodies, it will be reviewed by the GOC who may refer to it when carrying out its functions, such as dealing with fitness to practise allegations.

Draft rules and requirements for training establishments that want to run the specialist training programmes will be considered by Council in July. The GOC is liaising with interested training establishments, and it is expected that the first approved programmes will be up and running in early 2009.



Protecting the public – of optical regulation

As the GOC celebrates its 50th birthday, *Liz Carr* takes a look at optical regulation over the last half-century – and glimpses into the next...

“The Opticians Act signalled the end of nearly 60 years of debate and dispute for the optical professions.”

Early days

The General Optical Council today is a proactive and progressive organisation, continually looking to modernise and set the pace for best practice in healthcare regulation.

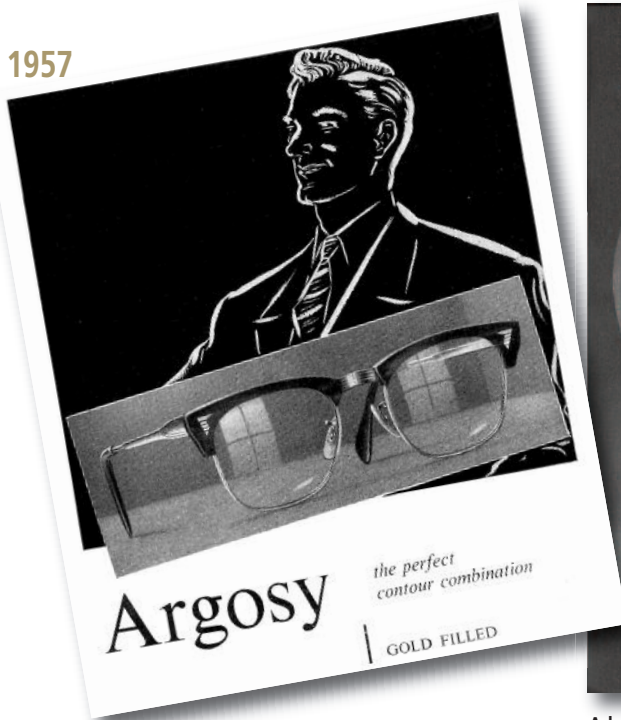
It's hard, then, to imagine how fraught with difficulties it was for our forerunners to get agreement and bring the original Opticians Act into law. When the Opticians Act received Royal Assent on 7 July 1958, it signalled the beginning of the GOC and the end of nearly 60 years of debate and dispute for the optical professions.

Attempts were made in 1904, 1927 and 1936 to introduce statutory regulation but internal wranglings between the various optical bodies, and arguments about timing and who should undertake eye tests, meant they all ended in disaster.

In 1949 the Crook Committee was convened to take yet another look at regulation. The Report was published in 1952, but two years later still nothing had happened. Lord Crook told the House of Lords: “Examining bodies and organisations of opticians have carried these matters as far as they can by years of voluntary effort ... unless a Council with the benefit of sanctions, if necessary, is made available, they cannot go further.”

“... unless a Council with the benefit of sanctions, if necessary, is made available, opticians can go no further.”

1957



Advertisement for men's spectacle frames
© The College of Optometrists.

1976



Advertisements for women's spectacle frames
© The College of Optometrists.

1962



1958

7 July: The GOC was formed and a sight test cost 2s.

The Munich air crash killed Manchester United's Busby Babes, and Edmund Hillary reached the South Pole.

1967

The GOC published a Ruling about publicity, which said that publishing a name coupled with a title as 'optician', 'dispensing optician' or 'ophthalmic optician' constituted publicity and was to be deprecated, unless the reference was in ordinary type!

The first ATM was introduced, and the Six Day War ended.

1973

First time there was a factory solely manufacturing CR39 plastic lenses which then gained widespread popularity.

The UK joined the EEC, and the first Open University degrees were awarded.

1978

Your Sight and the NHS but there were charges and lenses (single vision)

The first test tube baby the winter of discontent

celebrating 50 years



Montague Levy, 87, oldest registrant

“Optometrists have an enormous responsibility on them to recognise serious disease.”



Serap Akbulut, 16, youngest registrant

“I like the idea of giving people better vision so that they can see the world more clearly”

Ahead of its time

Over 50 years, the pace of change and the complexity of the organisation has increased, bringing with it new opportunities. Still practising at 87 years of age, Montague Levy has the distinction of being the oldest GOC registrant. When he started his career as an apprentice optician in 1935, things were very different. He said: “There wasn’t as much emphasis on pathology as there is now. Optometrists have an enormous responsibility on them to recognise serious disease.”

Today, optometrists can refer patients and prescribe therapeutic drugs in conjunction with an ophthalmologist, and from 2009 will be able to undertake GOC-approved training in independent prescribing of medicines for some ocular conditions. This widening scope of practice will increase public access to eyecare services, and take some of the pressure off hospital-based services.

The GOC is ahead of its time in a number of ways. For example, all GOC registrants are required to self-declare health issues and criminal convictions. In Fitness to Practise, the responsibility for investigating cases has been split, creating an independent Fitness to Practise panel which has changed expectations across the whole of the sector. The Council is also currently the only healthcare regulator to register students,

making them accountable for their conduct from the outset.

Web technology has played a key role in enabling more efficient CET procedures, such as checking minimum CET points for every registrant on each three-year cycle – something not possible with a paper-based system.

Council are also working to implement the changes recommended in the Government White Paper – *Trust, assurance and safety: the regulation of health professionals*. These include the reconstitution of a smaller and strategic board-like Council, and applying the civil standard of proof in FTP proceedings.

2008 and beyond

Fifty years after the GOC’s work began, the future of the optical professions looks bright. At 16, student dispensing optician Serap Akbulut is the youngest on the register. “I enjoyed science at school, and wanted to do something different. I like the idea of giving people better vision so that they can see the world more clearly”, she said. The combination of theory and practice appealed to her, and her ambition is to own her own practice.

Who knows what the hot topics of debate will be in another 50 years – but the GOC will be leading the way, striving to increase public protection and promoting high-quality eyecare.

1985

The eye test was free for frames (£1.44–£6); £2.90 per lens).

was born, and it was

Free NHS spectacles were only available for children and low income groups. The rules on publicity were amended but in line with the ASA, prohibited comparative advertising. The GOC published rules on the fitting of contact lenses.

Word processors were introduced, and Live Aid raised millions of pounds for Africa.

1995

An NHS sight test cost £13.41.

The US delivered a crew to the Russian space station Mir, and it was the 50th anniversary of the first atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

2008

The GOC reaches its 50th anniversary.

Happy 50th birthday, GOC

To commemorate the GOC's golden anniversary, key figures from the optical bodies have been sending in their birthday wishes.



On behalf of the members of the ABDO I am delighted to send both congratulations and best wishes on the 50th anniversary of the General Optical Council. Over that period the GOC has become a widely-respected and effective regulatory body. Your success has been built on the inclusive way you have treated the

professions, and I know that many dispensing opticians have played a significant role in helping to achieve that success.

In the past 50 years the dispensing profession has grown substantially, with now over 5,300 dispensing opticians as registrants. At the same time the demands upon both the registrants and the regulatory body have increased significantly. Public expectations have changed, and the introduction of continuing education and training, student registration and compulsory indemnity insurance have all been factors which have increased the workload for all concerned.

Despite the ever increasing demands, the good relations that have existed between ABDO and the GOC over the years have strengthened to the benefit of both registrants and the public.

Sir Tony Garrett
Chief Executive, ABDO



Across the world optometry is developing and growing. So it is interesting to reflect that it is only 50 years since the profession in the UK achieved regulation.

The regulatory framework ushered in by the Opticians Act brought recognition to the profession, and the GOC has since maintained standards in rapidly

changing times, ensuring that the profession developed in competence.

The past 50 years have brought great change, socially, economically and in what is expected from the profession. The next half-century for the GOC will be radically different. The new, smaller, Council will need to continue working closely with registrants and partners, to embrace the changes that are necessary to keep the profession at the forefront of delivering primary eyecare services across the UK.

Bob Hughes
Chief Executive
Association of Optometrists



As a long-standing supporter of the GOC, FODO is delighted to congratulate the Council on its 50th Anniversary. Throughout the years the GOC has sought to give priority to its role of protecting patients, whilst at the same time recognising the rights of professionals and providers. Key to this is achieving the right balance

between regulation and proportionality. Both the regulatory and market environments have become more challenging in recent times, and the GOC has rightly seized the opportunity of the Government's reform programme to respond to these challenges. We wish the GOC every success in doing so and for the next 50 years.

David Hewlett
Chief Executive, FODO



As the professional, scientific and research body for optometry, we congratulate the General Optical Council on reaching this important milestone!

Fifty years since its foundation, the GOC continues to play a fundamental role in protecting the public by promoting high standards of education and conduct.

We hope to strengthen our relationship in the coming years by continuing to work closely together, training the optometrists of today and tomorrow.

The College's predecessor bodies worked hard to establish the profession, the culmination of their work being the Optician's Act of 1958. This led to the formation of the GOC and the protected title for the term 'optometrist'. Then, as now, the need to communicate to the public the importance of maintaining good eye health under the supervision of qualified professionals was great. This has become a common goal for us both.

Optometry is an increasingly diverse, forward-looking and vibrant profession. We look forward to continuing to work closely with the General Optical Council as the profession grows and develops in the future.

Bryony Pawinska
Chief Executive
College of Optometrists

Regulation reform update

The GOC has recently agreed important changes as a result of the Government's White Paper *Trust, Assurance & Safety – The Regulation of Health Professionals in the 21st Century*. Maria Claridge outlines the key developments.



Council constitution

At its March 2008 meeting, Council agreed to reduce its size from 28 to 12 members. The White Paper recommends that councils of regulatory bodies become 'smaller and more board-like', with at least equal numbers of registrant and non-registrant members.

The process for appointing the new Council will begin from Autumn 2008, to take up office from April 2009. The Appointments Commission – an independent appointments body – will manage the process for the GOC.

Council also approved a person specification, which sets out the skills and qualities required of members. In addition to the professional and clinical expertise brought by registrant members, across the Council as a whole there will be knowledge and experience in areas such as:

- Governance;
- Finance;
- Education and training; and
- Audit/risk management.

Legislation detailing the composition of the Council, the terms of office of Council members, and criteria for the disqualification, suspension or removal of members from office is expected to be consulted on this Summer.

Committee constitutions

The GOC is also reforming its statutory committees. Council agreed that the Education, Registration, Investigation and Standards Committees should be retained. The size, composition, and quorum of each of these committees has been reviewed.

For transitional purposes, Council has agreed that the reconstituted committees will be populated from existing members

for a period of 12 to 18 months. Once the new Council is in place, it will agree a process for appointing new committee members.

All committees will engage with stakeholders. In particular, Council emphasised the importance of committees having access to advice from optical employers.

Standard of proof

Once enacted, the Health and Social Care Bill 2008 will require all UK healthcare regulatory bodies to apply the civil standard of proof (the 'balance of probabilities') rather than the criminal standard ('beyond all reasonable doubt') in fitness to practise proceedings. The GOC is currently consulting on changes to the Fitness to Practise Rules and the guidance to hearings panels. The consultation closes on 23 July 2008 and is accessible from the GOC website:

www.optical.org/en/news_publications/Publications/consultations.cfm

Stakeholder engagement

All UK healthcare regulatory bodies will also have a new statutory duty to cooperate with key stakeholders. New duties will require regulators to have 'proper regard' for the interests of registrants (including prospective registrants), and members of the public using their services. Councils will also need to cooperate with employers and educators for the relevant professions, and the bodies responsible for regulating other health and social care professions or health services.

In May, Council considered a range of approaches to stakeholder engagement. In addition to stakeholder input being available to committees through advisers, it was agreed that a formal GOC consultation framework would be developed. Council also agreed to consider establishing standing advisory groups or stakeholder reference groups.



Hearings Report

Director of Legal and Fitness to Practise, *Philip Grey*, reports on the recent cases before the GOC's FTP Committee.



Philip Grey

In February 2008, optometrist **Sanjit Bansal** appeared before the Fitness to Practise Committee following a theft conviction in 2006. He had been sentenced at Maidstone Crown Court to a 200-hour community punishment order and a compensation order of £1,510. The Committee noted that during the theft investigation Mr Bansal had failed to admit responsibility from the outset, and allowed suspicion to fall on others. He subsequently attempted to hide behind a false story, showed no consideration for his fellow employees and tried to prevent a criminal investigation. The Committee found Mr Bansal's fitness to practise to be impaired, concluding that the only sanction that would sustain public confidence in the profession was that of erasure.

In March, the Committee considered the case of optometrist **Jennifer Holmes**, who faced allegations of deficient professional performance during a performance assessment. The Committee found that she had not adequately recorded cup disc ratios during one examination, but found other allegations not proven. The Committee concluded that Mrs Holmes was not guilty of deficient professional performance, commenting that the one proven allegation was, in itself, of marginal significance. However, the Committee did affirm the importance of proper record keeping.

Also in March, optometrist **David Herschmann** admitted an allegation of deficient professional performance based on his failure to make a complete assessment of a patient's intra-ocular pressures, to undertake a visual field assessment or to recall the patient for further testing. The Committee commended Mr Herschmann's candour in admitting the allegations and in accepting his performance had been deficient. They commented that this was a single, isolated incident and that Mr Herschmann now understood the potential danger of failing to take all necessary steps to screen patients at risk for glaucoma. The Committee concluded that his fitness to practise was not impaired.

Still in March, an interim suspension order was imposed by the Committee upon student optometrist **Karampreet Singh**

Roewal. Mr Roewal had breached several of Aston University's disciplinary regulations and had been expelled with immediate effect due to the nature of the breaches. The Committee commented that it was well aware of the concept of student "high jinks" but that the apparent behaviour of the registrant was sustained and beyond those limits.

In April, optometrist **John Stevenson** appeared before the Committee to face an allegation of deficient professional performance following a performance assessment. A number of factual allegations relating to the provision of contact lenses were either admitted or found proven. Mr Stevenson admitted deficient professional performance, but the Committee found that Mr Stevenson's fitness to practise was not impaired. They commented that the evidence did not permit them to safely infer that those deficiencies represented a fair sample of his practise over time.

Also in April, the Committee reviewed and maintained an interim order of suspension against student optometrist **Nathan Hill**, which was initially imposed in May 2007. The Committee stressed that the substantive hearing should take place as soon as possible.

In May, the Committee heard the case of student dispensing optician **Minhal Shiraz Alloo**. The Committee found Mr Alloo's fitness to practise to be impaired as a result of his Crown Court conviction for theft of five spectacle frames worth £100. A three-month suspension order was imposed.

Also in May, the Committee heard the case against dispensing optician **Dalvir Kaur Kallar**, relating to her criminal conviction for theft. Whilst employed by Coton & Hamblin Limited, on 26 occasions between December 2003 and August 2006, Mrs Kallar stole approximately £5,000 worth of spectacles and contact lenses. The Committee found Mrs Kallar's fitness to practise to be impaired and erased her from the register.

Full transcripts of hearings are available from the GOC website, www.optical.org

Vetting requirements for new registrants from 2009

How does it affect you?

- The planned introduction date of the vetting and barring scheme is **12 October 2009**
- The scheme will initially apply to new registrants only. It will then be rolled out to cover all existing registrants.
- The ISA will charge a total membership fee of £64.
- Sector specific guidance will be drafted by the ISA for employers and employees to help them comply with the new system.

From next Autumn, new applicants to the Opticians Registers must be a member of the Government's new vetting and barring scheme.

The scheme is a result of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups legislation, which introduces vetting procedures for professionals, including optometry and dispensing optics, who work with children and/or vulnerable adults.

The Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA), or Scottish ministers, will notify the GOC of any registrant added to the list of individuals who are barred from working with children and/or vulnerable adults. In return, the GOC will have an obligation to notify the relevant authorities of any disciplinary action taken against a registrant, and to raise concerns about that registrant's suitability to work with children and/or vulnerable adults. The ISA and Scottish ministers may use this information to assess whether a registrant should be added to the barred list. Employers will be responsible for checking that their staff are members of the scheme.



Seeing the full picture

The GOC's consultation on a new equality and diversity monitoring scheme has just closed. *Kate Fielding* explains what it's all about.

Everyone is different. Optometrists and dispensing opticians are used to taking diversity into account as part of their routine. Eye examinations are tailored to each individual based on a range of factors, including age and ethnic background, which influence how likely they are to develop eye disease. Dispensing opticians know that the prescription is only half the story. Every face is unique, whilst lifestyle and even allergies will all have a bearing on the choice and fit of an optical appliance.

As the regulator, the GOC has to make decisions that affect large numbers of patients and the public, as well as our own registrants and other stakeholders. Without a 'customer' in front of us, we have to rely on other ways of understanding what each group's needs are, and what the GOC's policies and rules will mean to them.

One important way of building up this picture is to collect information about peoples' age, gender and ethnic background. Having this data will help us to start asking questions about areas where there seems to be a discrepancy – for example, if there are proportionately more registrants from a particular group appearing before our Fitness to Practise panels, or if some registrants appear to be less likely than others to register a speciality. We need to try to understand the reasons behind any of these issues, and make sure that they are not caused by unfairness in regulation. Having monitoring data will also allow us to measure the success of initiatives aimed at tackling inequality.

Whilst we need to meet specific statutory duties and obligations, it is important that equality monitoring is not just a 'tick box' exercise, but that we use it sensibly and proactively to make our systems better, fairer, and more responsive.

What we think the scheme should look like:

Comprehensive

Unless a high percentage of registrants return the forms, we will not be confident about the figures, and may not be taking the right action as a result.

Accurate

Information needs to be accurate, and up to date. By storing information in a separate, confidential area within our database, we can keep track of changes when people join or leave the register.

Confidential

No equality data about an individual should ever be published, or appear as part of the Registers. Where data is published it would be anonymous, usually in the form of statistics – eg the percentage of men and women on each of the registers.

Secure

Data should be restricted and controlled. People within the GOC who are investigating complaints, or those who are making decisions about registration or retention should not have access to individual equality and diversity data.

Consistent

Whilst we won't share individuals' information with other regulators, asking questions in the same format should help us to make comparisons across the healthcare professions. This might improve our ability to spot trends that merit further investigation or action.

What others have said:

Bryony Pawinska, Chief Executive, College of Optometrists:

"The College of Optometrists is fully committed to promoting equality and diversity in all aspects of our work. We welcome the GOC's consultation which will lead to the development of a scheme well placed to meet the new statutory obligations to report on equality issues."

Sir Tony Garrett, Chief Executive, ABDO:

"ABDO are happy to support the GOC in its move towards equality and diversity monitoring. We as a professional body are fully committed to the principles of equality and are sure that the GOC will approach this issue in a sensible and understandable manner."



Surinder Sharma

Surinder Sharma, National Director for Equality and Human Rights, Department of Health:

"The GOC are in good company in introducing equality and diversity monitoring as the BMA and GMC have also recently engaged in the same exercise. Monitoring will help them to know their membership better and enable them to see what further recruitment, development or training measures are needed to ensure that opticians are drawn from the widest possible pool of talent and mirror the population they serve."

Bob Hughes, Chief Executive, AOP:

"In line with developing public awareness of diversity issues, it is important that the GOC as a public body is fully aware of any potential issues that may affect its processes and methods of operation. The questions they will be asking practitioners are entirely routine and I hope our members will cooperate with this process."

What happens next?

We will analyse the results of the consultation and make any changes arising out of the consultation process. We will start issuing monitoring forms with registration forms from September. They will be included in retention forms for renewal for 2009/10.

Thousands set to smash CET target

Thousands of GOC registrants are on course to go above and beyond the minimum number of CET points required by the 31 December 2009.

“We want to encourage people not to treat CET as a task to complete, but rather an opportunity to remain professional, competent and up to date with current developments.”

As the current CET cycle reaches the halfway stage, the latest GOC figures show that 30 per cent of optometrists have already earned and confirmed more than 36 points – the minimum number for non-specialists. A further 17 per cent of dispensing opticians have also reached their target ahead of time.

CET manager, Jo Glover commented: “It is fantastic that most registrants are in a good position to not only complete the minimum CET requirement, but to go beyond it. However, for some practitioners there seem to be peaks and troughs in gaining their points. We want to encourage people not to treat CET as a task to complete, but rather an opportunity to remain professional, competent and up to date with current developments.”

To date, optometrists and dispensing opticians have gained an average of 28 and 20 points respectively. Contact lens opticians have also been busy, earning an average of 24 points each - exactly half their 48-point minimum requirement. This suggests that many practitioners are opting for a steady pace of learning across the three years.

There are 1,798 practitioners who are yet to register any CET points on www.cetoptics.com. Jo Glover added: “I am concerned for those practitioners who haven’t yet completed

any CET. Starting the learning process at the halfway stage means registrants are leaving themselves with an enormous amount to do before December 2009.”

Overall, an impressive 430,162 CET points have been awarded in the last year and a half. Those looking to top the points table for this cycle have a hard act to follow: one registrant has already racked up 285 points.



Business names and changes to GOS

From 1 August 2008, practices and businesses who provide ophthalmic services will need to have a contract with their PCT. ‘Grandfathering’ arrangements will no longer be necessary, as practice owners who are not optometrists or ophthalmic medical practitioners (OMPs) can become contractors in their own right.

The change in regulations does not have any effect on the requirement to register with the GOC as a business registrant. Although ‘lay’ people can hold a contract, any business using a protected title in their name must be registered with the GOC. Protected titles include ‘optician’, ‘optometrist’, ‘optical’ and ‘contact lens(es)’.

Use of any of these, or similar titles in a business name (eg Jones Optoms) by an unregistered business is an offence under Section 28 of the Opticians Act. Optometric advisers and PCTs have been advised to check GOC registration of any business using a protected title, and to notify the GOC of any cases where a business is falsely implying registration.

GOC finance officer retires after 21 years



In May, the GOC bid farewell to one of its longest-standing members of staff. After 21 years of service, Carol Ayton begins her retirement this Summer. First appointed as accounts assistant in 1986, Carol was promoted to the role of senior finance officer, running the Council’s finance function single-handedly for most of that time. Staff and members

gathered for a presentation ceremony held in Carol’s honour, where GOC chairman Rosie Varley paid tribute to the diligence, professionalism and commitment that had characterised Carol’s work throughout her tenure. An accomplished botanical painter, Carol is looking forward to devoting more time to her art, visiting galleries and travelling.

Got a view?

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

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