

General Optical Council

About us

The General Optical Council



About this booklet

This booklet tells you about us (the General Optical Council). It tells you what we do, and explains our services.

About us

We regulate opticians, students training to be opticians and optical businesses in the UK. There are currently around 23,500 optometrists, dispensing opticians, student opticians and optical businesses on our registers. We get our powers from an Act of Parliament called the Opticians Act.

An **optometrist** is the person who tests your sight. They can also fit and supply glasses or contact lenses.

A **dispensing optician** is the person who fits and supplies your glasses or contact lenses.

Optometrists and dispensing opticians are often referred to using the term '**optician**'.

Individuals who are registered with us are often referred to using the term '**registrant**'.

We use both these terms in this booklet to make it easier for you.

Ophthalmologists and **ophthalmic medical practitioners (OMPs)**

are medical doctors who are also allowed to test your sight, and fit and supply glasses and contact lenses. We don't register ophthalmologists or ophthalmic medical practitioners, as the General Medical Council (GMC) registers these types of doctors.

What is regulation?

Regulators protect the public by restricting who can practise a profession. We are one of nine healthcare regulators. We protect the public by regulating individual opticians and optical businesses to make sure they meet the minimum standards of conduct, education and performance.

We are independent of the Government, and our work is reviewed by a separate organisation called the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence (CHRE).

How we work

We have 12 Council members: six are registered opticians and six are 'lay' members (not trained as opticians). They oversee the work of the whole organisation and are responsible for making major decisions.

Seven committees help the Council and each Committee focuses on one area of our work. Staff based at our offices in London put the major Council decisions in to practice.

Our mission and values

Our mission is to protect the public by promoting high standards of education, behaviour and performance among opticians.

Our work is built on six main values. We aim for all our work to be:

- » proportionate – targeting the issues of greatest risk to public safety
- » accountable – involving stakeholders and partners
- » consistent – working with others to make sure our work is fair
- » transparent – explaining our decisions wherever possible
- » targeted – focusing our efforts where there is the most public benefit; and
- » well organised – providing value for money, high standards of customer service and promoting equality and diversity in all our work

What do you do?

We protect the public by doing the following:

1. SETTING STANDARDS FOR OPTICAL EDUCATION, TRAINING, PERFORMANCE AND BEHAVIOUR

Opticians who want to register with us must meet our standards of knowledge, skill and behaviour. These are set out in two documents, 'Standards in competence' (knowledge and skill) and 'Standards in conduct' (behaviour).

Optical businesses who want to register with us must meet our standards of behaviour, which can be found in the Code of Conduct for optical businesses.

These documents are available on our website, **www.optical.org**

2. APPROVING THE QUALIFICATIONS THAT LEAD TO REGISTRATION

Opticians need training to deliver good standards of eyecare. We assess and approve the education given to optometry and dispensing optics students in the UK to make sure the training meets our standards.

We decide on the content of all courses and qualifications that lead to full registration with us. We carry out quality-assurance visits to check that education and examination bodies are keeping to our standards.

3. PUBLISHING A REGISTER OF EYECARE PROFESSIONALS, STUDENTS AND BUSINESSES IN THE UK

Optometrists and dispensing opticians must be registered with us to practise in the UK. We publish registers of all optometrists, dispensing opticians, student opticians and optical businesses who are qualified and 'fit to practise', train or carry out business.

4. INVESTIGATING AND ACTING ON CONCERNS ABOUT ANYONE REGISTERED WITH US

We can take action if a registrant's 'fitness to practise' may be impaired (negatively affected) due to poor health, behaviour or performance. We get these powers from Parliament.

What is fitness to practise?

If an optician is described as 'fit to practise', it means they meet the standards of health, character, knowledge, skill and behaviour that are necessary for them to do their job safely and effectively.

What services do we provide?

We can help you to do the following:

1. CHECK AN OPTICIAN, STUDENT, OR OPTICAL BUSINESS IS REGISTERED

You can search the registers to check that your optician is registered with us. You can also use the registers to find an optician in your area. The registers are published on our website at **www.optical.org** and they are free to use. If you can't use the internet, you can phone our registration team on 020 7580 3898 (option 1). They will be able to tell you if an optician is registered with us.

2. MAKE A COMPLAINT ABOUT AN OPTICIAN, STUDENT OR OPTICAL BUSINESS

You should tell us if you think one of our registrants might not be fit to practise. This might be because of:

- » poor professional performance, such as failing to notice signs of eye disease
- » physical or mental health problems affecting their work
- » inappropriate behaviour, such as violence or sexual assault
- » being under the influence of alcohol or drugs at work
- » fraud or dishonesty; or
- » a criminal conviction or caution.

If a registrant does not meet our standards and is not able to do their job safely and effectively, we can stop them from working in the UK (often referred to as 'striking off'). We can also restrict the type of work they are allowed to do.

How do I make a complaint?

If you want to make a complaint about one of our registrants, you can find out how to do this in our booklet 'How to complain about an optician'. This is available at www.optical.org or by phoning 020 7580 3898 (option 5).

Contact us

Write to:

General Optical Council
41 Harley Street
London
W1G 8DJ

Phone: 020 7580 3898
Website: www.optical.org
Fax: 020 7436 3525
Email: goc@optical.org

Other useful contacts

Optical Consumer Complaints Service

For help with consumer issues, such as getting a refund for faulty glasses, contact the Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS) on 0844 800 5071 or at www.opticalcomplaints.co.uk

Advertising Standards Authority

You can complain about false or misleading advertising to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) on 020 7492 2222 or at www.asa.org.uk

Citizens Advice

If you are not sure who to complain to, or if you need legal advice, contact Citizens Advice on 020 7833 2181 or at www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Alternative formats

You can get this booklet in Welsh by visiting www.optical.org
