

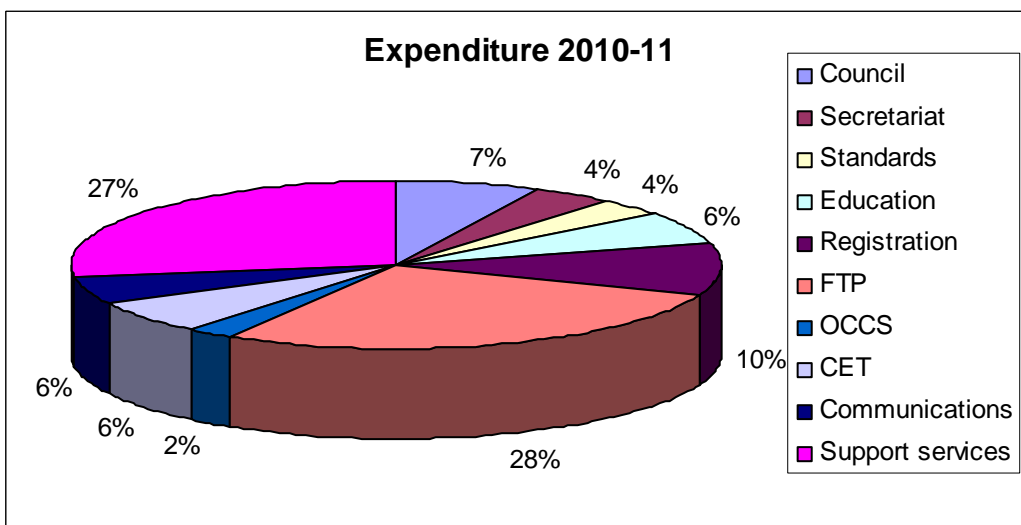
The 2010-11 retention fee

The annual retention fee for 2010-11 has increased for all registrants. In response to support from practitioners and representative bodies, optometrists and dispensing opticians will not pay the same fee for 2010-11.

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

The new fee amount was agreed by Council in November 2009 and applies to the next retention period, which runs from 1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011.

We recognise that this is a further significant increase for both the optical professions, particularly in the current economic climate. This leaflet explains why we have set differential fees, how we will use your fee, why the increase is needed, and what we are doing to keep costs down.



Your questions answered:

Why do optometrists have to pay more than dispensing opticians?

This year we consulted on the existing retention fee structure. Council agreed an interim reduction in the retention fee for dispensing opticians in response to feedback from registrants, and in consideration of the professional differences between optometrists and dispensing opticians.

It was felt that differential fees would reflect the fact that: dispensing is partially deregulated; dispensing opticians often earn less than optometrists; and they generally pose less of a clinical risk to the public and make up a smaller proportion of fitness to practice cases. Council agreed that it would be in the public interest to

encourage dispensing opticians to remain registered. However, there was no commitment to maintaining a reduction in the fee for dispensing opticians beyond 2010-11. Further work on fees will be undertaken next year to determine the long term policy for our fee structure.

Where does the money go?

Registration fees are our only source of income, and we do not receive any additional funding from Government. The Council's proposed expenditure for 2010-11 is £5.7 million. Overall, our greatest departmental expenditure is on fitness to practise, followed by support services (including office costs, IT and finance) then registration. There has been a significant increase in costs associated with modernising our processes and systems, and restructuring the organisation in response to the recommendations of the Government's healthcare reform programme. For a detailed breakdown of expenditure, see the bar charts on the front page. Further information is also available on our website, www.optical.org

Why has spending increased so much for 2010-11?

Over the last five years, the Council's operating expenditure has risen sharply. However, until last year, the fee amount was not increased. In the last two years, shortfalls were covered from surplus funds in reserves but this is no longer sustainable. The 'hidden' increases in costs now have to be met from the retention fee. At the same time, further increases in expenditure have arisen through the need to invest and modernise. Therefore, there has been a 'double' impact from these factors on the level of the fee this year.

What are the highest areas of expenditure?

Fitness to practise costs have gone up, partly as a result of an increase in the number of complaints: in 2009 the number of case files opened increased by approximately 15 per cent, compared with 2008. More cases are being referred for health and performance assessments, and more expert reports are being prepared. These changes benefit registrants as they allow alternative and supportive approaches to fitness to practise issues to be considered.

Legal costs will also increase as the Council's existing contract is up for tender next year. In 2009-10, we benefited from specially-negotiated, reduced rates. But we are unlikely to be able to achieve such low rates again. We are also investing in an electronic case management system, and in additional resources to reduce the time taken to investigate complaints. Speeding up the investigation process will benefit both registrants and complainants, by bringing matters to a quicker resolution.

There will be increased expenditure in Registration due to the costs of introducing a new online retention system. This will provide improved customer service, and in the long term, should result in cost savings, particularly if we are able to phase out the existing paper system.

Additional costs in support services include additional investment in IT; recruiting to vacancies on the Fitness to Practise panel; and training for our Fitness to Practise and Education Visitor panels.

Is the GOC doing anything to try and make savings?

Yes. We are committed to keeping costs down wherever possible. For example, although the number of FTP hearings has stayed the same, costs of hearings have reduced. This is due to an office refurbishment last year, which has allowed us to bring the majority of hearings in-house, saving over £40,000 compared with 2008-9 costs.

Some of the things we are doing will lead to greater long-term savings, such as:

- Developing online retention; and
- Using more electronic communications to cut costs on printing and postage, for example publishing the Annual Report in an online format.

Why can't I pay the retention fee in instalments?

We are aware that staged payments would offer registrants the flexibility to pay their renewal fee in smaller amounts. However, because the GOC is a statutory regulator, implementing a staged payments facility is not straightforward. We would need to amend current legislation, which is a slow process – probably around 18 months. There would also be costs to adapt our systems, and additional administrative and processing costs involved, particularly for following up missed instalments. There may be disadvantages to registrants who miss a payment and are removed from the Register as a consequence, particularly if they are experiencing financial difficulties. A detailed assessment will be carried out next year, to determine the full costs and potential risks and benefits of introducing staged payments, and the likely effect on registrants' fees, before a final decision is taken.

How does the fee compare with other UK healthcare regulators?

The increased retention fee is still lower than that which is set by most other UK healthcare regulatory bodies.

Regulator	No of registrants	Fee (at Nov 09)
Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC)	676,547 (at 2008)	£76
General Medical Council (GMC)	231,563	£410
Health Professions Council (HPC)	185,554	£76 (£152 for two years)
General Dental Council (GDC)	92,207	£438 for dentists; £96 for dental care professionals; £52

		for dental specialists
Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB)	58,452	£422 for pharmacists; £138 for pharmacy technicians; reductions for low income and non-practising registrants
General Optical Council (GOC)	18,116 full registrants; 4,511 students	£325 for optometrists; £280 for dispensing opticians
General Osteopathic Council (GOsC)	4,187	£750
General Chiropractic Council (GCC)	2,615	£1,250 for new registrations; £1,000 for annual renewals

What happens now?

- You must now complete the *Application for retention 2010-11* form.
- Return the completed form, along with the correct payment to:
Registration
General Optical Council
41 Harley Street
London W1G 8DJ
- You can track your application online via the new Registrants' Area of the GOC website. Via the Registrants' Area we will:
 - Notify you when we have received your form.
 - Tell you when your payment has been processed.
 - You can download your receipt as proof of payment.
- To access the Registrants' Area go to www.optical.org
- Select the Registrants' Area icon from the [top left corner]
- Log in using your personal username and password. These are enclosed with [this/your] retention pack.

Your retention application must reach us no later than 15 March 2010.

Box out

Missing the deadline means you pay more

If you fail to get your retention application, payment or both to us by 15 March deadline, you will have to pay a £20 administration charge on top of the basic retention fee. Processing late applications costs us money. Most registrants get their application in on time: they shouldn't have to pay for the minority who miss the deadline.

The restoration fee

The restoration fee is £70 on top of the basic retention fee. If you fail to get your retention application in before the 31 March 2010 but wish to continue practising, you will have to pay to restore to the registers.