

Registration of students in optometry and dispensing optics



A guide for training providers

About this guidance

This guidance has been prepared for teachers and other staff at education providers dealing with students who are currently or are considering studying towards a qualification in optometry or dispensing optics.

The document provides a simple guide to the General Optical Council's (GOC) key processes and timelines regarding the registration of optical students, including information on our requirements, policies and best practise advice. The guidance is intended to help you and your students deal with the registration process smoothly.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the more detailed information that is provided in the GOC's four Handbooks covering the requirements for the approval of optometry and dispensing optics courses, independent prescribing specialities and schemes for registration in the UK. The Handbooks are available in the Publications section of the GOC website, www.optical.org.

What is the General Optical Council?

The GOC is the regulator for the optical professions in the UK. We regulate opticians, students training to be opticians, and optical businesses in the UK. There are currently around 24,000 optometrists, dispensing opticians, student opticians and optical businesses on our registers. We get our powers from an Act of Parliament called the Opticians Act.

GOC student registration

The General Optical Council is required by section 8A of the Opticians Act 1989 (amended 2005) to maintain a register of persons undertaking training as optometrists and dispensing opticians.

All persons undertaking training provided by an approved training establishment, or obtaining practical experience or professional assessment in the work of an optometrist or dispensing optician, are required to be registered with the GOC. It is a criminal offense under section 28(1)(cc) of the Act for anyone to hold themselves out as being a student registrant while not being GOC-registered.

Student registration is intended to make students personally accountable for their conduct and to ensure that they do not pose a threat to the safety of the public while training. Requiring students to register with the GOC helps them develop a working knowledge of professional behaviour, ethics and values, as they are bound by the same GOC Code of Conduct as full registrants.

It is therefore very important that all students who are studying towards a qualification in optometry or dispensing opticians on a GOC-approved training course are registered with

the GOC as students. Students who are not registered with the GOC during their studies may be:

- Breaking the law.
- Not able to sit examinations or participate in clinics or training.
- Not able to have their qualifications recognised.
- Not be covered by any indemnity insurance policy.

The role of training providers

Approved training providers are required under the terms of their GOC accreditation to ensure that all students undertaking training, assessment or practical experience for the purposes of becoming an optometrist or dispensing optician are registered with the GOC for the duration of their training.

We need the assistance of training providers to confirm that all the students enrolled on a GOC-approved training course are registered with us. This is both to ensure that all those who are studying towards an optical qualification are properly GOC-registered, and to ensure that no one can represent themselves as being a registered student optometrist/dispensing optician without actually being enrolled on an approved course.

Specifically, training providers can help us in the following areas regarding student registrations:

1. Registering new students
2. Retaining continuing students on the GOC registers
3. Ensuring that all current students are registered during their studies
4. Dealing with those students who have been removed from the GOC registers

1. Registering new students

Our requirements

New students who will be studying towards a qualification in optometry or dispensing optics are required to complete an application for GOC registration as a student optometrist or dispensing optician, and pay the application fee. The application should be completed and processed before the student begins studying.

The student registration year begins on 1 September of each year. New students who will begin their studies after that date but who apply for registration in the previous registration year will have their applications processed by the GOC when they are received, but will not be added to the student registers until 1 September.

Registration Process

The GOC will liaise with each training provider to provide the correct number of registration application forms that are required, and send these ahead of the enrolment period. We will also include copies of guidance for students on the role of the GOC and the student registration process.

- Training providers should provide all prospective optometry/dispensing optics students with a paper copy of the GOC student registration form. Ideally, the registration application form and student guidance booklet should be included with

the letter offering the student a place on the training course. This helps minimise any delay in registration at the start of the student year.

- To ensure that the GOC student register is accurate, all student registration forms must be signed and stamped with an official training establishment stamp. If any forms are missing a signature and stamp, the GOC Registration Department will contact the training establishment for written confirmation of enrolment. If we are unable to confirm the student's enrolment with the training institution, we will return the application to the student – to avoid this happening unnecessarily, it is important that we have access to an appropriate point of contact at all training institutions, including in the summer holiday period.

The GOC holds student roadshows each year, at the beginning of the student year. These enable us to have face to face contact with first year students and to provide essential information. Wherever possible, we also collect any outstanding registration forms and payments at these events.

2. Retaining continuing students on the GOC registers

Our requirements

All continuing students, who will already be GOC-registered, are required to apply each year to renew their GOC registrations. This is known as 'retention'.

The student retention year runs from **1 September to 31 August** of each year. All continuing students need to complete their application for retention and pay the appropriate fee **by 15 July each year**, or else pay a late payment fee. If the application is not fully completed and approved by 31 August of each year, students may be removed from the student register from 1 September.

Each year we send notifications by post and email to all registered students by 1 April, reminding them of the need to apply for retention.

We advise students to submit their application for retention as soon as possible each year if they intend to continue their studies. We recognise that students will often wish to wait for their exam results before making a decision on whether to continue – we will, however, refund any students who have applied for retention of their registration but subsequently decide not to continue their studies, as long as they inform us before the end of the retention year on 31 August.

As part of their applications for registration/retention, all students are required to submit declarations regarding anything that might affect their fitness to undergo training – criminal convictions or cautions, disciplinary proceedings or health issues. Consideration of these declarations can take some time, as sometimes additional information or clarification is required – it is therefore especially important that continuing students who think that they may need to make a declaration submit their application as early as possible, to allow it to be considered and their application processed before the start of the new retention year.

Retention process

Note: the student retention process is improving in 2011. All current GOC-registered students can now complete their applications for retention through our website www.optical.org, by logging into the secure 'MyGOC' registrants area.

This online retention system eliminates the need to complete and send a paper application form (although paper forms are still available on request), and is much quicker and more secure than the paper system. More information on using the MyGOC area is available on the GOC website.

Each year, by 1 April we will contact all current students by post and email to remind them to complete their applications for retention by the 15 July deadline.

- Training providers can assist us by reminding students of the importance of renewing their GOC registration before the deadline, and encouraging students to complete their applications early.
- Additionally, training providers can remind students to keep their contact details up to date, to ensure that they receive all GOC notifications and reminders. Contact details can now be updated at any time in the MyGOC area of the website.

3. Ensuring that all students are properly registered during their studies

Our requirements

As noted above, it is a legal requirement that students who are training towards becoming an optometrist or dispensing optician are registered with us. It is also a legal requirement that anyone registered with us as a student must be currently studying towards an approved optical qualification.

As noted earlier, training providers are required to ensure that all students are GOC-registered for the duration of their training. In particular, training providers should be satisfied that any students sitting examinations/assessments that count towards their GOC-recognised qualification or undertaking supervised clinical practice have a current and valid GOC registration when undertaking these activities.

Process for checking student registrations

There are three key ways that training institutions can ensure that students are properly GOC-registered:

- Providing us with a class list of all enrolled students and following up discrepancies
- Checking students' registrations at key times
- Checking our Annual Removals and Monthly Amendments lists

Class list checks

Each year we check our list of registered students against a list of all students who are enrolled in approved optical training around the UK. Where there is any discrepancy, we will seek further information and, if necessary, either remove the student from the register (if they are not properly enrolled in an approved course) or liaise with the training provider to ensure that the student either registers with the GOC or ceases training.

To perform this cross-check of registration and enrolment information, we request that training providers provide us each year with class lists of all students enrolled on GOC-approved courses, in the format requested.

- Training providers can assist us by providing us with their class lists as soon as they are available each year. We request that the lists be provided by 1 October –

this is to enable us to identify any discrepancies as soon as possible, and address them. Class lists should be provided to us in an electronic format (ideally as a spreadsheet).

We recognise that it can take some time for training providers to finalise their class lists, as students may enrol late or change courses. However it is important that the class lists be provided to us in good time to ensure that legal requirements are met.

At any time during the year, we can also produce a list of GOC-registered students who have indicated that they are registered with a particular training provider. If a training provider would like to run their own checks of our register against their enrolment records/class lists at any time during the year, we can provide the relevant list. Providers should contact the GOC Registration Department to request a copy (contact details below).

Student registration cards

From 2011 we will be issuing all registered students with an annual GOC registration card. This will be sent out after the beginning of the retention year from 1 September of each year. Each year the card will be colour-coded and dated to help training providers easily confirm that the student's card is valid for the current retention year.

- We recommend that students be asked to show their current GOC registration card before sitting key examinations or assessments. The registration card is not definitive proof that a student is currently registered (this is because the card is issued at the start of the year, and some students may be removed from the registers during the year – which is why it is important that the monthly amendments list is checked, see below). However, in most cases having a current registration card will mean that a student is currently registered.

The GOC's new online retention process will also make it easier for training providers to ensure that continuing students are correctly GOC-registered from the start of the study year. All continuing students who complete their application for retention (including those who apply using a paper form) will be able to download and print a confirmation form and receipt from the secure MyGOC area of our website, once their application has been submitted.

The confirmation form, together with the payment receipt, will provide evidence that the student has applied for retention of his or her GOC registration, if the annual registration card has not yet been received in the post.

- At the beginning of the student year, training providers should ask that students show a copy of their GOC registration confirmation form and receipt before undergoing training, if their current registration card is not yet available.

Annual Removals and Monthly Amendments lists

After the end of each retention year on 31 August, we produce a list of all students who have been removed from the registers due to failing to renew their registration. This student removals list is emailed each year to our contact point at each training provider. Many of these individuals will have completed or not be continuing their studies; however,

some may have failed to complete their application for retention, but intend to continue training.

- Training providers should check the GOC annual removals list against their enrolment list, to identify any continuing students in their enrolment list who have been removed from the GOC register.
- Where we identify any unregistered students by checking the class lists, we will contact the training provider to inform them of this, as well as attempting to contact the student concerned. Training providers can assist us by also contacting that student to inform them of the need to register. Frequently, the reason that the student has not registered with us is because the contact details that we hold are incorrect or have become out-of-date – in these cases training providers are in a better position to contact the student.

During the year, a small number of students may be removed from our registers. This can be due to a Fitness to Practise finding, or for administrative reasons. Each month, we generate a list of all students who have been removed from the registers. This list of monthly amendments to the registers is also emailed to our distribution list.

- Training providers should check the GOC monthly amendments list against their enrolment list, to identify any continuing students in their enrolment list who have been removed from the GOC register.

4. Dealing with students who have been removed from the GOC registers

Where we remove a student from our registers, we will attempt to contact them to inform them of the removal (following a 28 day right of appeal). If the student wishes to continue training towards a qualification in optometry or dispensing optics, they will need to apply to restore to the registers.

As a rule, all unregistered students should not be allowed to undergo training, work with the public, or take any examinations or assessments towards an optical qualification until they have restored to the GOC register.

If we are aware that a student has undergone training while not registered, we are likely to require relevant parts of the training/practical assessment/examinations to be repeated before the qualification can be recognised, to ensure that appropriate standards of conduct and performance are met.

In some cases (where there is evidence that an unregistered individual deliberately misrepresented himself/herself as a student registrant), we may consider a criminal prosecution for misuse of title.

Process for dealing with unregistered students

As noted above, we will inform the relevant training providers of any students who are not currently GOC registered, either through the list of student removals, following the class list cross-check, or at any other time.

Students who wish to restore to the registers are required to complete a paper restoration application form, and pay an additional restoration fee (plus the full standard registration fee). The restoration application form requires students to provide information regarding any practical training or examinations/assessments they have undergone while unregistered, their supervision during that period, and whether they have represented themselves as a student registrant during the period of non-registration.

- Where necessary we may request information from the student's supervisor or training provider to confirm the information supplied. Training providers can assist us by dealing with these requests as quickly as possible, to minimise any disruption to the student's studies while their application for restoration is considered.

Students who confirm in their application for restoration that they have undertaken exams or assessments while unregistered are generally restored to the register, but are sent a letter informing them that those exams or assessments will not count towards their final qualification. A letter is also sent to the training establishment/supervisor to ensure that the required action is taken.

- Training providers are required to ensure that any unregistered students do not undertake training towards an optical qualification while not registered.

We recognise that it may not be practical to take attendance or require evidence of GOC registration to be shown at every class. However, where an enrolled student has been identified as being unregistered, it is particularly important that that individual is not permitted to undertake any practical experience or assessment that involves working with the public (including with other students), or to sit examinations.

For this reason, training institutions are expected to have processes in place to make reasonable checks at key points throughout the duration of an approved course, e.g. at the start of each year of the programme and before key assessments or examinations which count towards the GOC recognised qualification.

- Were it has been identified that a student has undergone an examination/assessment while unregisters, training providers should cooperate with the GOC to ensure that appropriate action is taken as quickly as possible (eg arranging for those examinations/assessments to be retaken).

If there are exceptional circumstances that may argue for a student to be allowed to undergo training towards an optometry or dispensing optics qualification while not GOC-registered, we will consider these on a case-by-case basis – the student and/or the training provider should contact the GOC to discuss this situation.

How to find out more

If you have any questions about our education policies or processes, or wish to discuss an individual student's circumstances with us, please contact:

Education

General Optical Council

10 Old Bailey

London

EC4M 7NG

Phone: 020 7508 3898

Email: education@optical.org

If a current or prospective student has a query regarding GOC registration, they can contact our Registration team:

Registration

General Optical Council

10 Old Bailey

London

EC4M 7NG

Phone: 020 7580 3898

Email: registration@optical.org