

# bulletin

Issue 16, Winter 10/11

General Optical Council  
41 Harley Street, London W1G 8DJ  
Telephone 020 7580 3898  
Fax 020 7307 3939  
www.optical.org

## Time for retention – have you done yours?

The GOC is urging all full registrants to complete their retention application by 15 March – and for the first time ever, they will be able to do this online.

### Importance of retention

Practitioners must renew their GOC registration by completing and returning a retention form along with the £270 retention fee. This is a reduction from last year's fee (see Retention fee reduced, below). You can either complete the form online, or download one from our website and post it.

Any practitioner who does not apply by the **15 March** deadline will face a £20 late application fee.

Practitioners who have still not renewed their registration by 31 March, including payment of the late fee, risk removal from the registers on 1 April. They will then be unable to practise in the UK, or use a protected title such as optician, until they have restored to the register.

### Online retention

We have listened to registrants' feedback and now, for the first time, registrants can renew their registration online. This will make



→ continues on page 2

## Retention fee reduced

**The retention fee for all fully-qualified and body corporate registrants will be £270 for 2011–12. Cost savings identified in the GOC budget mean that Council was able to recommend a reduction in the fee, and also introduce a low income fee of £170 for registrants who earn less than £12,000 a year.**

Chief executive and registrar, Satjit Singh, said at the November Council meeting: "Although there has been an increased spend over the past two years, the GOC is now beginning to reap the benefits of this investment by improving value for money for registrants."

Council members also said that there is a need to recognise the financial difficulties many registrants face. Mr Singh added: "As a result it was decided to offer a discounted fee of £170 to those earning less than £12,000 a year."

The low income fee has been introduced to encourage highly qualified professionals to remain on the registers, and so ensure high standards of care to patients. Registration benefits the public who

can have confidence in the skills and expertise of their practitioner. It means registrants who are currently not working full-time can afford to stay on the registers.

**"...the GOC is now beginning to reap the benefits of this investment by improving value for money for registrants."**

Some registrants have queried why the differential fee for dispensing opticians and optometrists has been removed. The registrar said: "Last year, Council noted that the differential fee level would not be permanent. They decided this year that to reduce fees for all fully-qualified individual and business registrants across the board was a better option."

ABDO, the AOP and FODO have welcomed the reduction in fees and the low income discount.

### In this issue

Retention fees reduced

CET and revalidation – sorting the facts from the myths

Meet the registration team

Telling it like it is – top five tips from OCCS

## Time for retention – have you done yours?



Optometrist Kam Gohil was one of the first registrants to test the MyGOC online retention system.

the registration process easier and more efficient, and is one of the modernisation measures we have taken to help us cut the registration fee.

Philip Hallam, GOC assistant director of registration, said: "Renewing your registration online will give you more flexibility and control over your application. It will be faster than applying by post and you will avoid having to pay for recorded delivery, which we recommend that all registrants applying by post use."

**"Online retention is the only way to provide instant confirmation that we have received your application."**

### How to use the online system

Online retention takes place through MyGOC – the new registrants' area of our website. We wrote to all full registrants in December, giving them instructions on how to complete retention online. There are three easy steps to renew your registration online:

1. Go to [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org) and follow the link 'apply for retention' on the homepage.
2. Once you have logged in, click 'apply for retention', follow the instructions to let us know any changes to your details and make any declarations
3. Pay your retention fee. Within three days, you will be able to log in to view and print your receipt.

If you experience a problem during the online application process or have a question, you can contact the registration team by email at [registration@optical.org](mailto:registration@optical.org), or by calling **020 7580 3898** and selecting **option 1**.

If you do not wish to complete your retention online, you must download a form from the website and complete retention by post. Sending retention forms in the post may lead to delays, or even forms going missing. If you do use this method, we recommend using recorded delivery, which will incur extra costs.

Online retention is the only way to provide instant confirmation that we have received your application.

### Business registrants

Online retention is not yet available for business registrants, although we are planning this for next year. Business registrants must apply for retention by post, as in previous years.

Many employers choose to pay their employees' GOC fees for them. If you wish to pay for an employee to renew online, you have two options:

1. Ask the registrant to pay their own retention fee online with a credit or debit card, and download a receipt so you can reimburse them.
2. Provide the registrant with a company credit card or debit card with which to pay their retention fee.

Although it is too late now to pay by Direct Debit, this option will be available to you next year.

### Students

In the next phase of the online retention system roll-out, we expect that students will be able to renew online this summer. Last year, we removed 386 students from our registers for failing to renew on time.

A few registrants tried the MyGOC online system before it launched, helping us to test that it worked and was user-friendly. Here's what two of them thought:

**Izzy Sayam**, who works as an optometrist on Oxford Street, was the very first registrant to complete retention this year. She told *bulletin*: "It was really quick and easy – just a few clicks and you're done. I like the freedom of being able to complete my GOC retention online. I already do lots of things online, such as banking and shopping, so it makes sense to be able to do this as well. Once you've got your username and password, MyGOC makes retention really fast."

**Kam Gohil**, an optometrist working in Ealing, said: "The MyGOC online retention system is easy to use, straightforward and well-laid out. It only took me a couple of minutes to use the system – online retention is definitely a good idea and will make the annual process of renewing your GOC registration much easier."

### Editorial

There's been a lot going on at the GOC and in the wider world which we're bringing to you in this Winter issue of *bulletin*.

First up, the most important thing for registrants is making sure you've applied for retention. Two good news stories are online retention which is our top story, and the reduction in fees. We wanted to introduce you to the people who deal with all your registration matters, so meet the team on page 6.

There's a round-up of news and reports on our activities over the last few months, and our charity feature is the Eyecare Trust. Find out about which Council member is involved on page 4.

There are a lot of changes in the healthcare environment as a result of the government Comprehensive Spending Review. We're looking at the impact of these changes on page 6.

If you have feedback on any of the articles in this issue, or there's anything else you'd like to talk about, please email us at [bulletin@optical.org](mailto:bulletin@optical.org). We look forward to hearing from you.

**Liz Carr** Editor



Anna Bradley

## Message from the Chair

**This is my first message to you as Chair. I have been in post for only six months, but it has been a very busy time! So if there is a single underlying message from me, it is that there has been much change at the GOC.**

First, our approach to fees has changed. At November Council, we reduced retention fees and announced that we plan to hold fees for three years. This is a consequence of work during the year, to establish a strong grip on our finances and a more strategic approach to our future. Next, we listened carefully to professional representatives and introduced a low income discount to help registrants in financial difficulty.

As I write we are preparing to go live with an online retention system for fully-qualified registrants. This will make applications quicker, simpler and more secure. You can find out more about the

system (page 1) and meet the team who have worked all year to implement it, on page 6.

We've also had change inside the organisation. We spoke with staff and stakeholders, as well as Council members, and have restructured to encourage more team working across the GOC and more focus on the essential work of protecting the public. I hope these changes will themselves be invisible to you, but the outcomes should benefit everyone. You can read more about the new directorates on page 3.

All of this change is, of course, set within the context of a new and changing political landscape and difficult economic times, with budgets being cut everywhere. Regulation is also changing, and the GOC has to be ready to address all of this. That is why the Council is working on its forward strategy and plan and excited about the appointment of a new Chief Executive and Registrar in January, who will lead us into 2011.

**Anna Bradley**

# New look for the GOC

In August the GOC Council commissioned a report to look at the structure of the organisation. We have just completed the first phase of restructuring which will ensure we are best placed to deliver the five year strategy, launched in April.

Three new directorates have been created: regulatory services; corporate services; and policy and strategy. Chief Executive and Registrar, Satjit Singh, heads up policy and strategy, which also includes communications and governance.

David Howell is director of regulatory services, which comprises standards, education, and legal and fitness to practise; and Jeff Cant is interim director of corporate services, covering finance, facilities, HR and IT.

Satjit Singh said: "We started this work because we wanted to make sure the GOC is best placed to protect the public by being an effective and efficient healthcare regulator. We are also determined to give our registrants the best value for money, so we needed to look internally at our structure and ask whether we were working together in the smartest way possible. The new-look organisation will be ready for the challenges ahead for the sector."

## Anna Bradley appointed GOC Chair

As *bulletin* went to press, we learnt that Anna Bradley has been confirmed as permanent GOC Chair by the Appointments Commission.

She said: "I am delighted to have been appointed as permanent chair. In the last six months, I have developed a much closer understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing the GOC. I am now looking forward to working with the staff, Council and our stakeholders to build on that understanding for the benefit of the public."

Ms Bradley's appointment is from 1 January 2011 to 2 June 2014. Read her Message from the Chair on page 2.



**"We started this work because we wanted to make sure the GOC is best placed to protect the public by being an effective and efficient healthcare regulator."**

## CET and revalidation – sorting the facts from the myths

This is the first in a regular series of articles by *Linda Kennaugh, Head of Education*, to let you know about future changes to the CET Scheme which will come into effect in two years at the start of the next CET cycle. We will also explain how we intend to use the CET Scheme as the basis for any future revalidation scheme.

**From feedback we've received from registrants, there's a lot of confusion about what's really going on, so this series is intended to give you the definitive facts and explain how you'll be affected.**

### What will the changes to the CET Scheme be?

The three year cycle and 36 point requirement will continue but from next cycle starting on 1 January 2013 you will need to ensure:

- one of your 36 points is obtained in peer review
- CET is undertaken across all competency areas
- CET points are achieved by undertaking more than one type of CET activity
- CET activity is spread throughout the cycle, not just at the beginning or end of the three year period with no activity in between

From 2013 contact lens DOs will no longer be required to undertake an additional 18 specialist points. Instead they must ensure that 18 of their 36 points were obtained in contact lens-approved CET.

Optometrists with a Therapeutic Prescribing Speciality will still be required to obtain 18 specialist points.

### What is revalidation?

The purpose of revalidation is to ensure that health professionals remain up-to-date and continue to demonstrate that they meet the contemporary standard required to be on the register.

### Why is the GOC implementing this scheme?

Revalidation is not a GOC initiative. All healthcare regulators are developing schemes in line with Government policy as a response to the Department of Health White Paper *Trust, Assurance and Safety*.

We recognise that optometrists and dispensing opticians pose a relatively low risk. So we believe that requiring our registrants to meet the enhanced CET requirements in order to revalidate is a proportionate response to that risk.

### Will it apply to me?

All registered optometrists and dispensing opticians must meet the CET requirements to remain on the register.

Future issues of *e-bulletin* will include updates and progress reports over the coming months.

# The Eyecare Trust – 10 years on

The Eyecare Trust is celebrating its 10th anniversary as a charity, providing independent eye health advice and information to the public. Originally known as the Optical Information Service, it has been operating for more than 50 years and is now being given a new lease of life. *bulletin* has been investigating...



James Russell (top) and Dharmesh Patel

**James Russell** is Vice-Chair of the Eyecare Trust. He is also a GOC Council member and a practising contact lens optician. He's been active in the optical profession for many years, and is a past president of ABDO.

"I had a lot of respect for many of the people involved with the Eyecare Trust, and when I saw the post advertised, I felt it would fit nicely with my GOC role. The Board of Trustees guides, steers and runs the organisation with one full-time staff member. Everyone else is a volunteer, but we're fortunate in being able to call on a range of advisers when we need them.

"I know from my work that there is a big need for trustworthy publicly-available information about all aspects of eye healthcare, which is non-specific. If you have a problem with your eyes, there are many specialist charities to help you. What the Eyecare Trust does is provide independent, generic information written by experts in their fields.

"As well as producing reliable advice and initiating public campaigns, our activities also support independents. If they become a Friend of the Trust, they receive a number of benefits including generic advertising and templates, point of sale information and a news alert service.

"Basically we're in the business of providing information, signposting to other information and supporting independent practitioners.

"Hot topics for us are 3D vision, computer vision, and internet supply. We're able to inform and educate the public so they're able to make an informed choice on these issues. An important topic for the future is the ageing eye. As we're becoming an ageing population, potential problems with our eyes will increase."

**Dharmesh Patel** is an optometrist with his own practice, he is active on his LOC and he does refractive surgery. Not content with these activities, he wanted to give something back to the profession he loves, and became Chair of the Eyecare Trust earlier this year.

"We have achieved a lot over the years, but when I took over we decided to start afresh and take the charity in new directions."

Dharmesh's aims for the charity are simple but ambitious. "We have big plans for raising the public profile of optics. These include the creation of the most comprehensive eye health resource available online, the implementation of a far-reaching public engagement strategy, and reconnecting with the profession to realise our shared goal to reduce avoidable sight loss in the UK.

"We've launched a new look to start us on the modernisation process. There will be new information on screening for diabetes, and there are plans for campaigns on presbyopia and macular degeneration.

## "We have big plans for raising the public profile of optics."

"As practitioners it's easy for us to talk to the patients we see every day. But how do you get to the people who don't go to an optician? This is the issue the Eyecare Trust will be addressing as a key objective as part of its three year plan.

"We also want to raise awareness of our work among practitioners and encourage them to join us. The more people are involved, the more effective we will be."

Find out how you can get involved in the work of the Eyecare Trust at [www.eyecaretrust.org.uk](http://www.eyecaretrust.org.uk). A flyer included with this issue of *bulletin* explains the benefits of becoming a Friend.

## To celebrate the Eyecare Trust's 10th anniversary here are 10 top facts about the charity

- 1** The Eyecare Trust is the **only** charity in the UK dedicated to providing public advice and information on all aspects of eye care.
- 2** The charity provides advice and information on hundreds of eye and vision related topics – from living with sight loss to treating conjunctivitis; stimulating your child's visual development to choosing the right vision correction, we've got it covered!
- 3** Many famous faces including Tony Blair, Sir Cliff Richard, Gary Rhodes, Joanna Lumley and Nanette Newman have supported our campaigns.
- 4** Every year our public information campaigns generate around 200 million opportunities for the public to see and hear positive eyecare messages in the media. Over the last decade we've worked with the BBC, ITV and all the national newspapers to highlight the importance of regular sight testing.
- 5** From billboard, print and TV advertising to viral emails, supermarket shelves and comic strips we've used lots of different means to encourage people to look after their eyes.
- 6** We've also worked with many household brands including LG, Sheila's Wheels, Rubicon and Optrex
- 7** We produce a range of practitioner resources, including our acclaimed patient information leaflets, designed to help enhance patient care and assist in the promotion of eye health issues to local communities.
- 8** Our website is a valuable first port of call for people looking for advice and information about eye health. Hundreds of thousands of people have logged on for advice about their eye health.
- 9** Our State of the Nation's Eyes research tracks public attitudes and behaviour towards eye care. Insights produced by this study include the fact that 20 million Brits are putting their sight at risk by failing to visit their optometrist for regular sight tests. And 85 per cent of us admit we experience problems with our vision.
- 10** The charity is governed by a board of trustees who give their expertise and time for free.

# Getting a new perspective

The GOC's Stakeholder Reference Groups (SRGs) are now up and running, providing a fresh input into our work from both patients and the profession.

**As reported in Issue 15 of *bulletin*, there are two groups of 12 members, both recruited earlier this year. One group is composed of optical stakeholders; the other of patients and the public.**

The groups have already been making valuable contributions to GOC projects and policies. In September, at their induction day, they considered potential changes to our fitness to practise rules and an aspect on our revalidation scheme.

More recently, the groups contributed to the revised version of our Consultation Framework, which is now available from [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org). The Framework sets out how we will go about consulting our stakeholders on policy changes, and serves both as an internal guide for staff and an explanation for external stakeholders.

The Framework was originally launched in March 2009. Since then, we have expanded our consultation activities so reviewed the Framework to ensure it remained current and included lessons we had learned during that time.

We also invited the SRGs to look at the document, providing a stakeholder perspective on how we could improve our consultation processes and make the document easier to understand.

The key aspects of the Framework include holding a full, public consultation whenever we make significant policy changes, seeking feedback from seldom-heard groups and ensuring we consult at a stage when the consultation can genuinely influence.

The Framework also commits the GOC to making qualitative analyses of consultation responses, not considering consultation to be a vote, and publishing feedback for the reasoning behind consultation decisions.

SRG members have also helped to test the new online retention system, helping us to make the site user-friendly for people of all IT skill levels.

The SRG members added suggestions to make the site more user-friendly.



The SRGs and Council members at work on their induction day in September. Prinal Patel is second on the right.

## Two members of the groups talked to *bulletin* about their work so far

**Meg Woollam** is a member of the patient group:

"In the darkened room behind the chemist shop, age seven, it seemed like the end of the world. I had to wear glasses. But what a difference it made to my quality of life. Years later, the optical profession continues to make the most significant difference to my everyday life of any of the health professions.

The SRGs give me the opportunity to give something back and to contribute to the standards and development of the profession.

I was able to offer a view on the GOC Consultation Framework, not only as a patient and customer, but also from my experience in customer service, complaints and communication.

The group members I met at the induction day had wide ranging views and experience. Through the groups the GOC will face challenge and hear fresh views and ideas. I hope you are ready for us!"

**Prinal Patel** is an optometrist:

"As a clinically-minded optometrist nourished from City University, my pre-reg year was a shock to the system, especially to learn how ill-equipped the public were to understand the health of their eyes.

The SRGs provide an opportunity to be part of a team that works towards improving patient safety. Having the ability to express opinions and discuss issues that lie at the forefront of the optical industry enables me to have a more diverse approach to the profession. It is also a great way to network with other members of the profession.

**"The SRGs give me the opportunity to give something back and to contribute to the standards and development of the profession."**

The induction day was a great opportunity to meet public members, the GOC and other professionals from various backgrounds. We spent the day learning more about the purposes of the SRG, meeting the Council members and discussing current issues, including revalidation and fitness to practise.

The SRGs are a great way for the GOC to gather ideas and opinions from a variety of members."

# Meet the registration team

Keeping on top of 24,000 registrations and all the complex questions that go with them is no mean feat. But *Laura Hytti* and her team take it in their stride.

Since 4 January they have been responding to telephone, email and written enquiries for this retention period. It doesn't end for them on 31 March though. By the middle of April the final letters relating to retention, withdrawal, removal and restoration will be done, and the team will be able to breathe out – before the student retention cycle starts in earnest.

Philip Hallam, assistant director of registration, said: "Registration work is a year-round job – the team is always working to solve registrants' problems. They're responsive, flexible and always keep a positive attitude."

The registration team comprises Enda Heslin, Laura Hytti, Ian Johnson, Katri Kajava, Mark Stanton and Terence Yates.



## Spotlight on...

Laura Hytti is registration operations manager, and has been part of the registration department for three years. She is also a key member of the team developing the online retention system.

"Online retention is a huge step for us and we're really hoping to achieve the desired effect. We're giving registrants more control over their registration, which will enable us to spend more time focusing on queries and all the complexities of registration."

Ian Johnson joined the GOC two years ago and he is currently looking forward to online retention. He said: "It's great that our registrants will be able to submit an online application this year.

The registrants' area is such well-designed resource, and it should empower users to submit and track retention applications without any fuss or bother". In his spare time Ian is a frustrated gardener, enjoying the busy city life of London, but lamenting the fact that his compact metropolitan flat lacks even the most basic window box!

Terence Yates told *bulletin*: "I am a gadget enthusiast into all sorts of technology, from electric toothbrushes to moving vehicles. In my work I'm keen to give a helping hand in any way I can. My motto is: 'If you fail to plan then you plan to fail'."

# GOC prepared for effects of government spending review

The coalition government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) has outlined proposed healthcare changes which will affect the GOC and optics as a whole throughout England.

## Abolition of Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) in England

We currently provide PCTs and SHAs with checks that optical providers are fit to practise. PCTs and SHAs often share information with us about optical complaints.

**"We will be keeping on top of all the changes in healthcare to make sure we continue to protect the public while being fair to registrants."**

It is unclear whether these important roles will be undertaken by the new NHS Commissioning Board, local and national HealthWatch, or local authorities in their new public health roles. We have written to the government expressing our wish that this work should continue and will seek to build relationships with the new bodies as soon as possible.

PCTs also fund optometrists' CET – we have asked the government to discuss any changes to this funding with us.

## Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence (CHRE) to become self-funding

CHRE oversees the work of the GOC and other healthcare regulators. It has always been government funded, but will now become self-funding. This means that we will have to pay a levy towards CHRE's costs – however, subject to unforeseen circumstances, we plan to absorb these costs and freeze our retention fee at around £270 for the next three years.

GOC Chair, Anna Bradley said: "We will be keeping on top of all the changes in healthcare to make sure we continue to protect the public while being fair to registrants. It is important that we work with the new and reformed organisations as they shape a new healthcare environment."

Other news from the CSR that could affect the GOC includes the abolition of the Appointments Commission and changes to education commissioning and patients' access to their records.

**You can read further details about these changes and our full response to the CSR on our website. Go to News and publications > Consultations > Our responses to read Anna Bradley's letter to the Department of Health.**

# Telling it like it is – top five tips from OCCS

**Communication (or mis-communication) is a recurring theme when patients make a complaint about their eye healthcare, either to the GOC or to the Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS).**

*bulletin* has been talking to the OCCS and has identified the five issues they hear about most frequently from patients. We thought it would be useful to highlight them here to help practitioners who may need to provide fuller information to patients in these circumstances.



Issue	Benefit to patient
1. Advise patients that they are developing cataracts as soon as this becomes apparent	Patients are made aware of the issue immediately rather than waiting until the cataract requires treatment
2. Explain to patients the timescale for issuing them with a contact lens specification post-fitting	Patients are informed that a specification can usually be provided within a given time i.e. three months of the final fitting. If not, they should be told why
3. Explain the payment structures relating to contact lenses	Patients will understand which elements of the fee relate to the sight test and which relate to the contact lens fitting. The direct debit payments they are asked to set up could also be clarified and confirmed
4. Explain to patients the purpose of interpupillary distance (IPD) measurements	To ensure patients understand why practitioners are entitled to withhold providing these measurements as part of the sight test.  For example, the correct IPD measurement will depend to some extent on the frame that the patient chooses. An IPD measurement provided on a prescription may not necessarily be correct if the patient is dispensed elsewhere with spectacles that do not fit properly
5. Explain that patients should present prescriptions within a reasonable timeframe after dispensing	To ensure that patients who attend with 'old' prescriptions understand the reasons why it may not be appropriate for them to be dispensed

You can find guidance on these issues from the College of Optometrists and Association of British Dispensing Opticians.

## New government scraps plans to transfer GOC fitness to practise adjudication

The coalition government has abolished the new Office of the Health Professions Adjudicator (OHPA).

### The GOC's hearings panel will continue to judge fitness to practise cases, instead of OHPA taking over this function.

OHPA was set to start adjudicating the GMC and GOC's fitness to practise hearings, following criticism of the GMC's ability to judge independently in the Shipman Inquiry. However, the government announced this summer that, following consultation results in favour of the government plans, the new body will be abolished.

The GOC initially supported OHPA and volunteered for our adjudication powers to be transferred. But concerns which arose over the course of the project led us to support its abolition when we responded to the consultation in October.

David Howell, director of regulatory services explained: "We were particularly concerned about the effect that OHPA

might have on our costs. We were initially told the setup costs would be £3-4 million but this increased to £10-16 million.

"We were also concerned that we were the only non-medical regulator to sign up to OHPA – the project would therefore not deliver the economies of scale we had expected."

The GOC will still include some of OHPA's policy ambitions in its own fitness to practise processes. The government has commissioned OHPA and the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence to work together to consider lessons learned to help all healthcare regulators. David Howell added: "In the end, neither the government nor the GOC considered OHPA to be cost-effective. However, we have learned a lot and will use that knowledge to improve our own fitness to practise processes."

### News in brief

Calling all optical employers... when you employ an optometrist or dispensing optician, make sure you check they're GOC-registered by searching the online registers at [www.optical.org/en/our\\_work/Registration/search\\_the\\_registers.cfm](http://www.optical.org/en/our_work/Registration/search_the_registers.cfm)

The Fitness to Practise annual report 2009-10 is now available online from our Annual Reports publications page at [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org).

Published for the first time, the report includes statistics on cases, describes the workings of the Investigation and FTP Committees, and highlights developments and modernisation in our FTP processes.

Also launched is a new booklet which will be sent to registrants who find themselves the subject of a complaint.

*What happens if a complaint is made about me?* offers information about the fitness to practise process, the individuals and committees involved, and potential outcomes of an investigation. It is also available online in the 'Investigating complaints' section of [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org).



You can read the GOC's response to the OHPA consultation at [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org) > News and publications > Consultations > Our responses

# GOC goes out and about

## Student roadshows 2010

Just before the start of the academic year, members of the registration department visited universities and colleges in Glasgow, Ulster, Manchester, Cardiff, Cambridge and London to explain the importance of student registration.

We were delighted to be able to send representatives to each university hosting a student roadshow, which we organised in partnership with The College of Optometrists. We have also visited all the universities and colleges currently running approved training courses in dispensing optics.

Ian Johnson of the registration department talks about taking part in the Anglia Ruskin student roadshow.

"We're always encouraged by the welcome we receive from staff and students at these events. It's great for us to get away from the confines of the office to visit our new student registrants on their campuses.

"Meeting a new intake of students gives us a chance to humanise the registration process and is easily the most effective way of explaining the role of the GOC.

"In Cambridge we collected a bundle of registration forms from first year students. We were able to address their registration queries in person. For example there were quite a few fully qualified dispensers, beginning a course in optometry who didn't know whether they should fill out a student registration form (yes) or a transfer form (no).

"Conversely, students already active on the register, who were switching courses, eg. from dispensing optics to optometry, were told they needed to complete a student transfer form rather than a student registration form.

"The day ran like clockwork and we had plenty of time to reorganise the paperwork and review the visit on our return journey. Mission accomplished."

## Exhibitions

Last September, we met hundreds of staff and volunteers from Citizens Advice bureaux across the country, at the conferences of Citizens Advice (for England and Wales) and Citizens Advice Scotland.

We were there to discuss the sorts of complaints we can and can't deal with, our standards and the importance of checking that your optician is registered.

Simon Grier, GOC Communications Officer said: "We see Citizens Advice staff as a key audience. We were able to explain where the GOC is able to help patients and where complaints may be better dealt with by the OCCS, at a local level or by a different body."

**"We're always encouraged by the welcome we receive from staff and students at these events. It's great for us to get away from the confines of the office to visit our new student registrants on their campuses."**

We also attended the third annual Scottish Health Service Regulation event, meeting staff and Council members from our fellow regulators and furthering our commitment to being a UK-wide regulator.

Later this year, we will again exhibit at Optrafair in Birmingham from 9-11 April. GOC staff will be on hand for registrants to discuss any issues relating to our work, including online retention, the future of CET and ways of getting involved with our work.

Registrants will also be able to pick up a copy of our new booklet, 'What happens if a complaint is made against me', which explains how the complaints process works and registrants' rights in that process.



## And finally...

This is the last printed edition of *bulletin*. To help keep retention fees down, we've decided to concentrate on publishing *e-bulletin* more frequently. We're always looking for ways to improve communication in cost-effective ways, and we think that publishing *e-bulletin* six times a year will contribute to that goal. We'll be able

to bring you news faster, together with more interviews and features on current topics.

Look out for the new *e-bulletin* arriving in your inbox, and if there's something you'd like to see included, please email us at [bulletin@optical.org](mailto:bulletin@optical.org).

### Got a view?

Have your say by emailing us at [bulletin@optical.org](mailto:bulletin@optical.org) or writing to:

**The Editor**  
GOC bulletin  
41 Harley Street  
London W1G 8DJ

**Is your email address up to date? To make sure you continue to receive *e-bulletin*, log into MyGOC and add your preferred email address. If you haven't logged in before, now's the time to start! Check page 2 or your retention pack for more information.**