

GENERAL OPTICAL COUNCIL

**DRAFT minutes of the fourth public meeting of Council in 2019 held on
Wednesday 13 November at 10:00 at 10 Old Bailey, London, EC4M 7NG**

Present: Gareth Hadley (Chair), Sinead Burns, Josie Forte, Mike Galvin, Rosie Glazebrook, Scott Mackie, Clare Minchington, David Parkins, Helen Tilley, Glenn Tomison and Deborah Bowman.

GOC attendees: Lesley Longstone, Alistair Bridge, Nicola Ebdon, Janet Adeyemi (minutes), Subo Shanmuganathan, Dionne Spence and Mark Webster.

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| | Welcome |
| 1. | The Chair welcomed members, employees and those in the public gallery to the public meeting of Council. A particular welcome was extended to Deborah Bowman (GOC Lay Member) and Janet Adeyemi (Governance and Compliance Manager) who were attending their first Council meeting. |
| 2. | Council extended its gratitude to Lisa Harmshaw, Governance Manager, and Nicola Ebdon, Head of Governance, who were both leaving the GOC. The Chair thanked both Lisa and Nicola for their professionalism and contribution to improving the GOC's governance and wished them well with their next professional steps. |
| | Apologies |
| 3. | Apologies were received from Roshni Samra. |
| | Declaration of members' interests |
| 4. | <p>The following declarations were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Item six (Education Strategic Review): all registrant members declared an interest in this item due to their involvement in the management, delivery and design of education provision, pre-registration and post-graduate training as they were likely to be directly affected in their non-GOC roles by the direction, progress and outcome of this review. In addition, David Parkins declared his role as a member of the Clinical Council for Eye Health Commissioning which advises/seek to influence NHS commissioning processes in England (through a Memorandum of Understanding with NHS England) and Chair of the London Eye Health Network, NHS England/NHS Improvement; and Item twelve (Registration Fees Rules 2020/21): all registrant members of Council as they will be affected by this decision. |

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| | Council agreed that these declarations did not represent a significant conflict and that all members could continue to participate in the discussion and make decisions as required. |
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| | Minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2019 |
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| 5. | Council approved the minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2019 as an accurate record of the meeting. |
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| | Updated actions – C33(19) |
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| 6. | Council noted the actions as well as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • action14(19) that Lesley Longstone (Chief Executive and Registrar) had taken over as Chair of the Chief Executive of Regulatory Bodies' Group (CEORB). It was noted the CEO had discussed potential areas of bi-lateral collaboration with the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC), particularly in relation to the Education Strategic Review and Business Regulation and discussions would be continuing over the coming months. It was agreed a paper detailing the outcomes from these discussions would be brought to a future Council meeting. |
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| | Matters Arising |
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| 7 | Council noted : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in relation to issues raised in the Optical Consumer Complaints Services (OCCS) annual report considered at the last meeting, it was noted that the Director of Education has picked this up as part of the ESR and CET reviews. Council requested David Parkins to follow up on the specific issue raised regarding delays in referrals and consultations on wet age-related macular degeneration (AMD) with the OCCS. • in relation to the new optometry programme at the University of Huddersfield, it was noted that no concerns had been raised in relation to the progress made since the last Council meeting; and • the Director of Strategy updated the Council on <i>Love Your Lenses</i>, the safe contact lens use initiative and informed Council that the Eyecare Trust and BCLA hoped to maintain momentum of the campaign and were looking to secure funding for this. They had included this work in their strategic plan. |
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| | Chief Executive and Registrar's report – C34(19) |
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| 8. | Council noted the content of the report and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • welcomed the latest Professional Standards Authority (PSA) review, where the GOC met 22 of the 24 standards. It was noted that GOC had not met one standard in relation to Registration and one in relation to Fitness to Practice; |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • noted the work on EDI was progressing well and the work to establish diversity groups to support women, LGBTQ+, BAME and disabilities had progressed; and • noted the launch of ‘<i>Standards for Optical Businesses</i>’ (which came into effect on 1 October 2019) with a webinar which had received good feedback. A targeted standards website to support the introduction and provide a wealth of information about GOC standards was launched on the same day. It was noted that membership organisations had supported the launch sending targeted communications to their members. It was requested that a review of the effectiveness of the communications plan, including feedback on the launch, be presented at the next Council meeting; • noted that the first cycle (2017/18) of the refreshed <i>Annual Monitoring and Reporting (AMR)</i> process concluded with publication of the sector report in October 2019; • noted the revised measures and resultant data for the College of Optometrists which had been agreed prior to publication; • noted that the GOC had imposed a condition on the University of Portsmouth to restrict student intake and was in regular communication with the University to address concerns. A meeting with the University would be held in November 2019 to discuss the programme and progress made; • noted that open fitness to practise (FTP) case volumes were down by 24 per cent since the start of the reporting year and 17 per cent since the end of quarter one and that this was a good indicator of a future improvement in performance; • noted that Mike Galvin had attended an FTP hearing which he found a hugely valuable learning opportunity and encouraged all Council members and staff to do likewise; • noted that the Director of Education had met with the Optometric Advisors from the 4 nations to explore the existing system of funding of undergraduates’ education and CET and how it might need to change to meet the requirements of the ESR and the new CPD programme; • noted that the FTP decision audit report continued to provide a good level of assurance with confirmation of ‘substantial compliance’ with the Council’s statutory obligations. Council requested this report be shared with Council members as soon as available and a summary brought to a future public Council meeting for discussion; and • noted that, The GOC would be re-tendering the OCCS contract in accordance with procurement rules with the successful provider commencing their contract in April. |
| 9. | <p>In discussion, Council welcomed the work on EDI. In response to a question on how Council members could support the agenda, it was noted Council members should continue to engage with staff, including at a future</p> |

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| | <p>“meet the staff” session intended to focus on EDI. It was noted that the success of the work in this area would be measured via the staff survey. Council commented on the importance of considering our role as a regulator in promoting EDI in the external context, with a view to improving the experience of patients.</p> |
| | <p>Chair’s report – C35(19)</p> |
| 10. | <p>Council noted the report from the Chair updating members on his activities since the Council meeting on 10 July 2019 and agreed to appoint Deborah Bowman as a member of the Remuneration Committee for a period of three years with immediate effect.</p> |
| | <p>Draft GOC Strategic Plan: 2020-2026 – C36(19)</p> |
| 11. | <p>Council reflected on the outcomes of their discussion the previous day when Council had considered the draft strategic plan for 2020-2026 and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • were supportive of the mission, vision and values as set out in the paper, noting the word ‘<i>continually</i>’ had been added to the mission statement; • welcomed the intention to consult externally, including with students and newly qualified practitioners as well as staff; • noted the EDI strategy had been included as part of the strategic plan, rather than being a separate document; • acknowledged that continual improvement was needed in IT especially in relation to the CRM system; • welcomed the fact that contact would be made with the relevant statutory bodies in the devolved nations to ensure the strategy and successive business plans reflected needs across the whole of the UK; • requested consideration be given to ensuring the strategic plan did not become a wish list and that adequate time and resource be given to achievement of the plan; • requested the engagement objective be widened to “customer service” across all regulatory areas (not just FTP) ; • requested three-year milestones/objectives be included in the plan to enable Council to assess progress against the overarching strategy; and • requested stakeholders be asked to prioritise elements of the plan as part of the consultation to assist Council when finalising the plan and making financial decisions. |
| 12. | <p>In considering the suggested outcomes by which the success of the strategic plan would be measured, Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • agreed achievement of the PSA standards as one outcome; • requested the outcome in relation to reducing the level of FTP complaints be removed as this was not a measure of success; • noted that the level of public confidence was already at a high level and so maintaining that may be more appropriate than raising it; |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • requested a breakeven financial measure be included; and • requested the customer satisfaction outcome be broken down into separate measures for complainants, registrants and stakeholders. |
| 13. | <p>Council noted that the plan would be amended and issued for consultation, following which, a version with a rationale for changes made as a result of the consultation would be presented to Council for consideration and agreement in February 2020. Council delegated authority to the Chief Executive and Registrar and Chair to approve the strategic plan for consultation. Council also noted that the Chair proposed to consult with the Senior Council member to ensure feedback provided by Council on 12 November has been taken into account. Council requested they be given time to consider the plan ahead of the next Council meeting and requested pre-set questions be sent to Council members in advance of discussion to finalise the plan.</p> |
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| | Education Strategic Review: implementation plan – C37(19) |
| 14. | <p>Council considered the implementation plan for the ESR in conjunction with the impact assessment and noted the response to the consultation findings. In considering the implementation plan, Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discussed the three different stages of the ESR implementation, were supportive of the concepts and themes as set out in the paper and welcomed the intention to continue engagement with key stakeholders; • noted the associated risks set out in the plan and acknowledged that funding might be exacerbated due to the uncertainties around the impact of the UK leaving the EU. Council noted Brexit could reduce the number of EU students registering at UK universities and negatively affect university finances. Council commented that providers might stop running courses and that there may consequently be a lack of availability of local placements, and noted actions being taken in this respect; • noted the Executive had met with five of the 23 signatories of the joint letter that had been received by the GOC to discuss clinical content, single point of accountability, clinical placements and employer influence and that they were given assurance that their concerns were being listened to and considered as part of on-going work; • agreed the various steps to mitigate the risks as set out in the paper, noted that the GOC needed to operate swiftly and efficiently in approving programmes under the new system and sought assurance that enough resources would be provided to ensure this could be achieved; • noting that the timescale was ambitious, agreed that it was important to stick to deadlines for delivery of the changes, think |

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| | <p>through the transition period within the project plan, and consider the role of the Office for Students and other education regulators in implementation;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • noted the transition time frame and reiterated that this must be done in a supportive way for each provider; • noted the importance of a gateway review and were advised that this would be included in the plan at the end of stage one; • considered the potential impacts on disadvantaged students, noting that EDI data would be requested via the Annual Monitoring Report this year. Council welcomed the intention to engage with other stakeholders/regulators to learn how they have addressed EDI issues and requested that impacts on all student groups be monitored and well as those who are fully qualified; • noted how the Executive would manage new approvals of courses under the current system as part of the change programme; and • noted the Executive have held provider forums to ensure that current and new providers are aware of the ESR. • noted the GOC were liaising with the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) to learn from their experience of delivering changes in education; • noted the implementation plan was ambitious and some additional mitigating actions may need to be put in place; • reiterated the importance of the changes being planned properly and that engagement with all stakeholders continued to embed the changes according to the timeline; • requested that the Executive continue to consider how changes in CET link to the ESR review; and • approved the implementation plan for the ESR in conjunction with the impact assessment. |
| | Financial performance report: six months to 30 Sept 2019 (inc. Q2 2019/20 forecast) – C38(19) |
| 15. | <p>Council noted the half year report and the actions planned to achieve financial targets for 2019/20 and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acknowledged the GOC continued to perform ahead of its financial targets, whilst recognising financial challenges remained; and • noted the GOC continued to track towards a surplus in year three and that some savings were being reinvested. |
| 16. | <p>The main headlines in the report noted by Council were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • actual performance for the six months ended 30 September showed a net deficit of £145k compared to a budget deficit of £528k; • registrant income of £4,717k was £122k less than the budget - due to higher than expected removals at the end of the three-year CET cycle; |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • over 15 separate strands within the efficiency programme had been identified; and • total expenditure for the six months ended 30 September 2019 amounted to £5,054k compared to a budget of £5344k - a positive variance of £290k. |
| 17. | <p>In discussion of the report, Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • were informed of the key drivers of the improved performance; • noted the £366k improvement for the financial year to 31 March 2020; • noted the Audit, Risk and Finance (ARC) Committee had interrogated financial planning data at their development day and had requested enhanced data; • requested a tighter link between finance and the strategic plan; • requested more information on the sensitivities and vulnerabilities in the forecast, as well as assumptions made and certainty of when the GOC would break even; • agreed they had confidence in the numbers presented; • requested realistic projections on project spend out of income not reserves and a better understanding of investment needed for delivery of the IT strategy; • requested a true understanding of headcount including separating out fixed term staff; • suggested age profiling of registrants as it may help income modelling to verify income predictions; • noted they were not being asked to agree the three-year financial plan at this stage and confirmed that they would need to see the three-year financial strategy and business plan in order to be able to agree the strategic plan and budget for 2020/21; and • noted that the Director of Resources was developing a plan in relation to efficiencies and future spend. |
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| | <i>The meeting adjourned at 12:20 for lunch and reconvened at 12:50</i> |
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| | Professional Standards Authority (PSA): performance review – C39(19) |
| 18. | <p>Council received the PSA performance review and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • noted the GOC had met 22 of the PSA'S 24 standards of good regulation, which was also the case in the previous performance report; • noted an improvement in FTP performance in that the GOC had failed to meet only one FTP standard compared with two in the previous report; • noted the Executive were liaising with the PSA in relation to the two standards which had not been met - the third Registration standard regarding the accessibility of information about registrants (due to an |

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| | <p>accuracy check of the GOC register finding seven errors relating to FTP decisions) and the sixth FTP standard regarding dealing with FTP cases as quickly as possible (due to limited evidence of improvement in timeliness since the last performance review);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • noted work which had been undertaken and was continuing to improve performance in respects of both standards and that enhanced IT systems would have a positive impact on performance; • noted the Executive had taken part in a pilot of the PSA's new standards; and • welcomed the next performance review which would cover the nine-month period 1 January to 30 September 2019, noting that initial information had already been shared with the PSA and that the GOC was expecting a response shortly. |
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| | Performance report: quarter two 2019/20– C40(19) |
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| 19. | <p>Council considered the quarter two performance report and noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the successful launch of updated <i>Acceptance Criteria</i> and an enhanced <i>Triage</i> process (phase1 of the FTP improvement programme); and • the delay in the implementation of CRM changes. Council were assured that with the new Head of IT in place the Registrar had confidence in achievement of the GOC's IT infrastructure objectives. |
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| 20. | <p>In relation to the challenges outlined in the report, Council recognised the work and barriers involved in getting the organisation infrastructure working effectively and requested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the IT strategy be brought to Council for consideration; • that the performance report include progress against the IT strategy and efficiency programmes; • all challenges identified in the summary be explained clearly in the body of the report; and • that the headcount graph identify the number of staff on fixed term contracts. |
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| 21. | <p>In relation to FTP performance it was noted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the focus in quarter two had been on triage and fast-tracking high-risk cases, which would have a future negative impact on the open case age as the lower-risk but older cases had not progressed as quickly; • the focus in quarter three would be on cases currently in stage three to ensure they progressed to hearing; • there were multiple reasons for cases to be part heard, which were often unpredictable and which led to difficulties in re-scheduling due to availability of the five panel members; • the legislative change project included an objective to reduce hearing panel size from five to three. If there were any delays to the Government's programme for overarching legislative change, it was |

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| | <p>requested that changes deemed necessary to ensure efficiency within the GOC processes be considered as candidates for stand-alone changes using the s.50 procedure; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a positive response had been received from the FTP defence panel in relation to the challenges the GOC faced in obtaining hospital records. |
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| | Equality Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) monitoring report 2019 – C41(19) |
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| 22. | <p>Council considered the 2019 EDI monitoring report and provided the following feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the report gave a better picture of registrant diversity which would enable the organisation better to assess the impacts of its work; • multivariate analysis would be helpful in the next report; • a communications plan to explain what the GOC was planning to do to better understand the data and address any impacts should be developed; and • care should be taken when interpreting the data to avoid drawing too simplistic conclusions. |
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| | Registration Fees Rules 2020/2021- C43(19) |
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| 23. | <p>Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • approved the Registration Fees Rules for 2020-21 in accordance with the full tariff set out in the published paper; and • the Chair of Council and the Registrar signed the Fees Rules for 2020-21 on behalf of Council and advised that these would be published on the GOC website shortly. |
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| | Approval and quality assurance: |
| | a) Teesside University; and |
| | b) University of the Highlands and Islands |
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| 24. | <p>Council considered the new programmes and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • noted that after the successful completion of these programmes graduates would be eligible to join the College of Optometrists' Scheme for registration; • received assurance from the Education team that all conditions that required completion prior to accreditation had been fulfilled or were in progress as expected and that robust processes were in place to monitor and report on conditions; • commented that it was difficult for Council to assess the recommendation from the Education Visitor Panel (EVP) without more contextual information but was assured that the Registrar considered information in detail ahead of presentation to Council for decision; |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • considered Council's role in being assured that there were robust processes in place and were assured that the Annual Monitoring report would be presented to Council for its consideration; and • requested that the public visit report template be amended to remove the providers' contact details. |
| 25. | <p>Council considered the information presented and granted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provisional approval for the BSc (Hons) Clinical Optometry programme at Teesside University, noting the arrangements for a different academic year from January to December; and • provisional approval for the BSc (Hons) Optometry programme at the University of Highlands and Islands (UHI), noting the number of students needing places in Scotland and the availability of supervisors were issues to keep under consideration. |
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| | Council forward plan – C42(19) |
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| 26. | <p>Council noted the forward plan for 2020 and requested the following changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • include the education annual monitoring report; • remove the registration fees rules 2020/2021 from the July schedule – which was a typographical error; and • include the annual audit of FTP decisions for the February meeting. |
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| | Any other business |
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| 27. | There was no other business. |
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| 28. | The meeting closed at 12:40. |
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| | Date and time of next meeting |
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| 29. | The next public meeting of Council would be held on Wednesday 26 February 2020 at 10 Old Bailey, London, EC4M 7NG (time to be confirmed). |