

Education Strategic Review (ESR): Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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[What is the Education Strategic Review \(ESR\)?](#)

The purpose of the ESR is to review and make recommendations on how the system of optical education and training should evolve so that registrants are equipped to carry out the roles they will be expected to perform in the future to meet patient needs.

Since the review's launch in 2017, the GOC has consulted extensively to understand the key risks, opportunities and impacts facing the sector, such as the need to respond to the changes in the needs of patients, the roles of optical professionals, and delivery of healthcare across all four nations in the UK.

We have published an [infographic](#) which sets out the key elements of the ESR.

In addition, we have produced a [video about the ESR](#), which includes information about what it is, why we've launched it and how the reforms are being developed.

[Why is the GOC conducting the ESR?](#)

The optical sector is evolving and the services that GOC registrants are expected to deliver are changing.

We identified drivers for changes in the education and training of optical professionals. These included ensuring that registrants respond to changes in the:

- needs of patients (for example, the impact of an ageing population and the increasing prevalence of certain long-term conditions and co-morbidities);
- roles of optical professionals (which are changing due to numerous factors – for example, changes in technology, and clinical leadership expectations, end to end case management); and
- delivery of healthcare across the four UK nations (due to service delivery pressures, contracts, tariffs and outcome measures).

We are conducting this review to continue to protect the public by ensuring that education and training for optometrists and dispensing opticians equips individuals to meet patient needs, adapting with changing roles and technology.

The proposed changes in education and training respond to changing demographics and associated patient needs, advances in technology, austerity in the NHS and workforce pressures for ophthalmologists. The sector recognises that optometry is shifting from a science discipline to a clinical vocational one.

The ESR is one half of the overarching picture of how to support and develop our optical professionals so that they can meet changing service demands. For this reason, the role of Continuing Education and Training (CET) is equally critical in the upskilling of current professionals to deliver clinically focussed and patient-centred care. This integration is essential in order to augment multi-disciplinary team working in secondary care environments.

What is the role of the GOC in the ESR?

As a regulator, one of our main functions is to assess and approve the quality and content of education provided for those training to practise optometry and dispensing optics in the UK. We do this in three ways:

- We set criteria for all higher education programmes and qualifications in optics that lead to registration with the GOC.
- We approve programmes and qualifications that meet these standards.
- We carry out quality assurance visits to check that education providers are maintaining and improving standards.

We are therefore conducting a review of the criteria for all higher education programmes and qualifications that lead to GOC registration. This includes our Education Standards, Core Competencies (Outcomes for Registration) and our Quality Assurance and Enhancement method. We will be turning our attention towards postgraduate qualifications (IP and CLO) later this autumn.

We want to shift our regulatory approach to being outcome-based rather than through prescriptive inputs – which can restrict innovation – and ensure that our approval and quality assurance of the programmes is consistent, fair and proportionate to risk.

What is the evidence base underpinning the ESR?

The below is a non-exhaustive list of the evidence underpinning the ESR.

- External reports and benchmarking, for example:
 - [The Foresight Report](#), 2016
 - [Optical Workforce Survey](#), 2015
 - [QAA Subject Benchmarking for Optometry](#) 2015
 - [SIGN Guidelines for Glaucoma referral and safe discharge](#)
 - [Ophthalmology Common Clinical Competency Framework](#) 2016
 - [College of Optometrists Guidance for Professional Practice](#) 2017
 - Education and quality assurance provision of UK health and education regulators
 - Ophthalmology data, Royal College of Ophthalmology, Nov 2018
 - [The Francis Inquiry](#), 2013
 - [GMC State of medical education and practice in the UK](#), 2018
 - HESA data
 - Education provider data between 2010 and 2018
 - Parkins, D. et al. 2014 'The developing role of optometrists as part of the NHS primary care team' *Optometry in Practice*, Volume 15 Issue 4.
 - Baker et al. 2016 'Effectiveness of UK optometric enhanced eye care services: a realist review of the literature', *Ophthalmic and Physiological Optics*.
 - Steven, K. et al. 2017 'Toward interprofessional learning and education: Mapping common outcomes for prequalifying healthcare professional programs in the United Kingdom' *Medical Teacher* Vol 39 Issue 7.
 - [Needs for changing roles in Optometry/Ophthalmology](#).

- [GOC research and consultations](#)¹:
 - ESR Consultations:
 - ESR Education Standards and Learning Outcomes – May 2019
 - ESR Concepts and Principles Consultation - April 2018
 - ESR Call for Evidence – June 2017
 - ESR Research documents:
 - Perceptions of UK optical education – June 2018
 - Education Patterns and Trends – November 2017
 - Professional Boundaries in the Optical Sector – September 2017
 - [Sector research](#):
 - Optical sector report 2014-15
 - Stakeholder perceptions report 2016,
 - Public perceptions reports 2016, 2017, 2019.
 - Registrant survey 2016.

- GOC Advisory Panel, which includes members from and replaces the following Committees:
 - GOC Standards Committee
 - GOC Education Committee
 - GOC Companies Committee
 - GOC Registration Committee

- GOC working groups:
 - GOC Council
 - CET Reference group
 - Expert Advisory Groups (EAGs)

- Qualitative input to the ESR from wide-ranging stakeholders:
 - Education providers
 - Employers
 - Newly qualified registrants
 - Experienced registrants
 - Students
 - NHS Bodies
 - Regulators
 - Charities
 - Consumer Organisations
 - Interest Groups and Societies
 - NHS
 - Patient groups
 - Government agencies

¹ <https://www.optical.org/en/Education/education-strategic-review-esr/esr-policy-development-and-research.cfm>

- Experts in Non-UK undergraduate optical education in Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada and South Africa.

We look forward to the ongoing dialogue as we ask the wider sector to co-create solutions with us.

[How is the GOC responding to the changes in the sector?](#)

As a regulator, we need to make sure that education is adequately preparing the sector for the needs of patients in the future.

The ESR is responding to long-term changes facing the sector such as an ageing population; the localisation of healthcare delivery into the high street and the home; and changing roles in the optical sector brought about by developments in technology.

By introducing new Education Standards and Outcomes that are less prescriptive we hope to enable education providers to be sufficiently agile to respond to change.

[What will happen to current registrants?](#)

We understand that undergraduate education and training is just the start of a healthcare professional's lifelong learning. Our Continuing Education and Training (CET) function is also under review to consider the needs of current registrants within a changing healthcare sector. We want to make sure that current registrants are suitably equipped to respond to the future healthcare sector and are considering the changes that we may need to make in our CET function.

[What has happened to the Education Standards and Outcomes that were consulted on in 2019?](#)

We accepted the majority view that the Learning Outcomes needed more work. We have remained committed to removing the barriers that a prescriptive set of competencies entail and continue to support innovative and agile thinking in course design and assessment.

We launched separate Expert Advisory Groups for optometrists and dispensing opticians who have incorporated the feedback from the previous consultations and have reworked the draft Learning Outcomes into Outcomes for Registration. You can view and contribute to the current ESR consultation via the [GOC Consultation Hub](#).

[How does the GOC approve new optometry courses?](#)

We are responsible for protecting the public by setting the standards for all optometry programmes in the UK and for approving and quality assuring these programmes. Any programme of education and training designed for students who undertake the programme to be able to join our register and practise as an optometrist would require our approval.

Our approval function is described in the Opticians Act and our process includes scrutiny by a GOC Education Visitor Panel, chaired by a lay person. The panel is made up of individuals with significant and varied experience in academia, optometry and ophthalmic dispensing and, quite frequently, includes an ophthalmologist too.

The final decision as to whether to approve a new qualification is made by Council taking all information into account, including the recommendation of the panel, who look holistically at the programme's quality and consider whether each of our standards is met.

[How does the GOC ensure standards remain met, after approval?](#)

As part of our quality assurance processes, we publish our visit reports on our website so that the public can be assured that the qualifications we approve meet our standards and, where standards are not met, we set time-bound conditions which providers must meet in order to demonstrate that they continue to meet our standards.

[Is the optometry degree apprenticeship being approved?](#)

We have not received any application to approve a degree apprenticeship in optometry and we will not consider any application until such time as the 'optometry degree apprenticeship standard' is approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (and a programme is then designed to meet both sets of standards).

[So, degree apprenticeships need to meet two regulatory standards, rather than just the GOC's?](#)

This is correct.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education are responsible for approving the 'optometry degree apprenticeship standard'. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education has made clear that it would not approve the proposed optometry apprenticeship standard without receiving assurance that it is consistent with our requirements.

Once the Institute's apprenticeship standard is approved by them, any education provider would need to design their programmes and start our robust approval process (as outlined above).

[I'm concerned about the impact of optometry degree apprenticeship on the sector, what should I do?](#)

We have heard numerous concerns from the sector about the potential impact that a degree apprenticeship may have on optometry jobs and the optical workforce. Whilst this matter is outside of our regulatory remit, the professional bodies may wish to explore these issues in more detail and consider what action can be taken to mitigate or resolve those concerns.

[I'm concerned that an optometry degree apprenticeship will lessen or 'dumb down' the quality of optometry education, what is the GOC's view?](#)

We do not agree that a degree apprenticeship will lessen the quality of education because all programmes are held to the same set of GOC education standards, and all programmes go through our robust approval and quality assurance processes.

Is the GOC changing their education standards in order to approve degree apprenticeships?

Under our current education standards, degree apprenticeships could already be approved (although we would still require the Institute's apprenticeship standard first, before we consider any degree apprenticeship application, as explained above).

As part of the Education Strategic Review, we are looking to strengthen our standards to make them more robust and improve the quality of education. Some of the key proposed new requirements which will ensure quality are that:

- providers of approved qualifications (the Single Point of Accountability) must be legally incorporated and to have appropriate contracts between constituent bodies (if any). Contracts will need to clearly set out responsibilities between organisations. This new requirement will improve public safety and provide clarity for students and those providing experiential and multi-and inter-disciplinary learning opportunities.
- approved qualifications must be listed on one of the national qualification frameworks. This will have a positive impact on quality of education and regulation, as well as public confidence.

Coupled with our proposed rigorous approval and quality assurance process, the new standards intend to ensure that quality is further improved.

What steers/proposals were agreed by Council in July 2019?

The five proposals agreed by Council in July 2019 are:

1. A model in which any 'programme of study' which leads to registration is led by one accountable provider, who is permitted to work in partnership with other organisations and determine the amount of integration within the programme. This provider would be known as the single point of accountability (SPA);
2. A common assessment framework which maintains comparable outcomes between providers but supports innovation and agility underpinned by rigorous quality and assurance controls;
3. Increased clinical content of undergraduate education and training to support early exposure to patient groups;
4. Increased emphasis on professionalism and clinical leadership; and
5. Support for newly qualified professionals, exploring CPD that includes requirements around mentoring and peer reflection.

These proposals are fully explained in our [2019 consultation response report](#).

What concerns have been raised to the GOC through their engagement with the sector?

We have received helpful and constructive feedback regarding our proposals. Within the feedback, we identified six key areas of concern. These are:

- the influence of the commercial sector/employers;
- confusion and concern regarding the 'one accountable provider' proposal;

- confusion regarding the common assessment framework proposal;
- impact on clinical placements;
- funding; and
- implementation timescales.

Will academic standards be compromised by business influence?

Effective healthcare education and training must be informed by developments both in practice as well as the latest clinical research. Both the education and the commercial sector share a common interest in developing optimal education that is fit for future healthcare models.

Many universities already work successfully with the commercial sector across a variety of academic and vocational courses. We are confident that universities and commercial partners can develop robust agreements and governance frameworks to ensure both parties are not exposed to undue risk or uncertainty.

What does the GOC mean by the first proposal of ‘single point of accountability’?

When we refer to a single point of accountability (SPA), we mean that a student’s whole educational journey is overseen by one single accountable provider/organisation. The organisation/provider can choose to work in partnership with other organisations to deliver their course, but ultimately there is one provider who is accountable to both the student and the GOC.

It is not:

- only one single national education provider – there can be many providers delivering education and training.
- an extension of the GOC’s regulatory powers/role in setting education standards and approving and quality assuring qualifications. The GOC is responsible for approving and quality assuring qualifications but not delivering courses.

What is a common assessment framework?

We are considering the best way to set assessment criteria for the professions. We want to enable education providers to have flexibility in when and how they choose to assess student attainment – as long as the student achieves the standards expected of a ‘safe beginner’.

Will the proposals increase the number of placements required? Will there be enough placements available?

The ESR aims to enable flexibility for providers to determine their pedagogy and delivery modes so that their students achieve the requisite skills and knowledge for a safe beginner. There are many ways in which increased clinical experience can be achieved which may not necessarily increase the number of placements required – such as, but not limited to, simulation, use of volunteer patients, and on-site clinics.

How else could providers increase clinical experience?

Increased clinical experience can be achieved through a variety of ways including, but not limited to, simulation, use of volunteer patients, and on-site clinics.

What considerations are being taken into account for funding?

We are keen to work with stakeholders to explore ways to secure additional funding for optical education and training. This includes working with all UK governments and Health Education England, the Departments for Education, Health and Social Care to explore what this might look like in the future.

It is important to note that the GOC does not have a role in funding or commissioning of services. We are pleased to learn that organisations and individuals within the sector have started to engage more with different organisations to discuss these topics further.

What is the current timescale for implementing the reforms?

We want to adopt a flexible approach to enable providers who are keen to innovate to do so, while recognising that others will need more time to make the required changes.

Following agreement at the November 2019 Council meeting, the implementation plan is as follows:

- Stage one (September 2019 – summer 2020): Key deliverables developed, approved and published
- Stage two: Provider readiness – education providers will prepare for implementation
- Stage three: Implementation – following successful programme approval, providers will begin teaching their new courses. We will work with providers to determine which tranche may be realistic for them.

What are the next steps for ESR?

We have worked with two Expert Advisory Groups (EAGs), one for Optometry and one for Ophthalmic Dispensing, to develop the draft Education Standards for providers and Outcomes for students, taking into account the feedback from previous consultations.

To ensure everyone has an opportunity to contribute and give their views on the work of the EAGs and development of the ESR proposals, we are currently consulting on proposals to update our requirements for GOC approved qualifications leading to registration as a dispensing optician or an optometrist.

To have your say, visit the [GOC Consultation Hub](#).

I would like to be on a dedicated ESR mailing list

We will provide wide-reaching updates through our usual communication channels – such as registrant emails and via the website.

If you would like to be added to our dedicated ESR mailing list, please contact esr@optical.org