

Education Strategic Review

Project Plan – Executive Summary



Introduction

We launched our Education Strategic Review (ESR) last year with a Call for Evidence between December 2016 and March 2017. We have recently published a summary report of the responses we received and are now setting out how the Review will continue by building on this evidence. This will include evaluating all relevant policy issues and options and regularly engaging with stakeholders to make recommendations about our future education standards and requirements for optometrists and dispensing opticians.

Our Education Strategic Review will be guided by three important principles:

1. Building on evidence and good practice:

The requirements we place on education providers should be based on an understanding of relevant evidence and reflect evolving good practice in education.

2. Fostering professionalism:

The future standards and requirements that we recommend should produce well-rounded healthcare professionals and instil in them a desire for career-long professional development to help them maximise their potential.

3. Looking ahead into the future:

To ensure that our Review takes into account and, as far as possible, anticipates how the delivery of eye care is likely to change in the future.

It is our responsibility to ensure that, as the optical sector evolves, we continue to protect the public by ensuring that the accreditation, quality assurance and standards of optical professionals' education in the UK continues to be fit for purpose. Our future standards and requirements must also build a solid foundation of professionalism and a commitment to career-long learning and development.

We have listened to the Call for Evidence feedback from our stakeholders and will now draw upon it as we move into developing our proposals for the future of education in the optical sector.



Call for Evidence

What we asked

In December 2016 we published a Call for Evidence seeking feedback on some wide-ranging questions about the future of eye care and what this might mean for the education of future optical professionals.

What we heard

The response to the Call for Evidence demonstrated a significant amount of stakeholder interest in this project and there was also strong support for conducting the Review at this time.

We are grateful for the range of detailed, thorough and considered responses that we received. We heard from individual registrants and from organisations representing many of our registrants and the wider eye health sector. Of the 55 responses we received, we heard from 17 registrants, 16 education and training providers, nine professional bodies, four optical businesses, three patient groups and six other types of organisation.

There were some clear points of consensus within the responses that the optical professions may need to adapt and develop around the importance of embedding professionalism and remaining clinically focused but optimising practical experience, and of engendering a culture of career-long learning. There were also a variety of views about potential future curriculum content and approaches to quality assurance of our education standards and requirements.

The responses were independently summarised in a report of what we heard that can be found on www.optical.org/en/news_publications/Publications/policy-and-research-papers.cfm. This includes publication of all the responses we have consent to publish.

The summary report highlighted to us many areas of consensus, as well as some varied views. These included:

There is consensus on what are predicted to be the developments in eye care provision and also what may be the barriers to achieving these changes. (p9)

An enhanced clinical role is widely expected for both optometrists and dispensing opticians. (p12)

...there is consensus on what are regarded to be desirable principles or outcomes of the approach to education. (p16)

There are mixed views as to whether the GOC should retain the current optometrist/dispensing optician distinction on the register. (p17)

There are mixed views on whether the GOC should accredit and quality assure additional or higher qualifications. (p22)

The Review will build upon the range of feedback we have received, and also ensure that our direction of travel effectively complements and supports the development of our other policies and functions, including our Standards of Practice and our Continuing Education and Training (CET) requirements.



Our next steps

The Education Strategic Review will have multiple phases and elements that will build upon our initial Call for Evidence. The Review will be divided into a number of phases.

These comprise:

- *Call for Evidence*
- *Policy development*
- *Decision and readiness*

Each will have specific deliverables for completion within a defined timeframe. Where we can, we will in parallel seek to make appropriate modifications to our current education quality assurance approach in line with the direction the overall Review is taking.

Policy development

We must ensure that our education standards and requirements keep pace with what optometrists and dispensing opticians do, and have the potential to do, in practice. That is to ensure all new practitioners are equipped to practise safely and confidently as soon as they join the register and that our education requirements continue to facilitate safe and effective conduct of registrants for the health, safety and well-being of the public.

We will undertake research when we need to and evaluate a range of relevant policy options, as well as considering the following issues:

- The future scope of practice and career pathway for optical professionals, and the extent to which dispensing opticians and optometrists are distinct, overlapping and/or interlocking professional groups with the potential to develop 'enhanced skills' and /or focus on specialist areas.
- The relationship between educational inputs, outputs and outcomes and the impact of these on practice from first registration, in accordance with our professional standards and statutory aims, in order to evaluate and establish programme sufficiency at the level that enables education provider freedom while robustly securing assurance of practitioner competence and patient safety.
- Equipping future registrants to practise more fluidly across primary and secondary healthcare settings, including in multi-disciplinary contexts, and the potential to optimise the cost-effective delivery of eye health services through the transfer of some service delivery from hospital-based settings to community-based optical practices.
- Recognising the need to potentially re-balance clinical and technical theoretical and practical elements to optimise the patient-facing components, potentially from an earlier stage of the educational process.
- Embedding the learning and practice of professionalism at all stages of pre-registration education, including communication, evidence-based decision-making, reflective learning and practice, safeguarding and professional ethics as a foundation for career long learning.
- Recognising that for many optical professionals, clinical roles will be combined with non-clinical ones, including business, people or educational management and leadership, throughout their professional life and also contributes to a safe, sustainable and progressive sector fit for meeting ongoing patient need.
- Enabling practitioners at all stages of their career to promote good eye health management and safe patient self-care; effectively manage increasing patient demand; and safely and competently provide eye health services to patients with co-morbidities and complex health conditions.

Our next steps

- Recognising that the optical professionals of the future will need to have sufficient agility to navigate and thrive in a technologically dynamic environment and potentially changeable business models in a way that is safe, competent and meets patient needs and expectations.
- Balancing educational innovation and flexibility with the ability to achieve a consistent level of educational attainment, based on adequate assessment and supervision, that provides public assurance in the practice of the 'safe beginner/ starter', and segueing coherently into specialised postgraduate education and continuing training.
- Attaining and maintaining consistency of mechanisms to demonstrate readiness to join the register, by implementing educational quality assurance mechanisms that are cost-effective, proportionate and command public and professional confidence.

Engagement and Consultation

We are committed to ensuring our stakeholders are actively engaged and involved with the Review, its development and implementation. We will take an inclusive and proactive approach to communication in order to take the optical and wider health sector along with us and move forward together into the future of optical education.

As we progress through each stage of the Review we will continue to develop opportunities for engagement and consultation for organisations and individuals. This will include establishing a Stakeholder Forum dedicated to the Review as a way of involving all stakeholder organisations as the work progresses. We will also develop other ways to engage with all our stakeholders, including current and recent students, patients and carers, current practitioners, education providers, professional bodies and other regulators. We will also continue to consult at key points during the Review.

We have developed a communication and engagement strategy for the Education Strategic Review that emphasises the following:

- **Raising awareness** of the Education Strategic Review and optimising opportunities for **two-way communication** between the GOC and stakeholders, at key stages.
- Effectively **planning and managing** our Review communication to provide clarity, understanding and constructive engagement.
- Reflecting the Review's three **guiding principles** in our communication and engagement approaches.

- Being **inclusive** in our communication and engagement, and providing an **open and listening** ear throughout the Review.
- Hearing the voice of **patients and carers**, and those that represent them.
- Promoting the **role and functions of the GOC**, particularly with regard to its statutory role in optical education and training, with accuracy and clarity.

All our proposals will be developed in a way that enables us to continue to uphold our statutory duties, including to protect the public and to promote high standards of professional education.

We expect to be able to hold our next public consultation on the Education Strategic Review in late 2017 and anticipate that this will focus on the broad policy direction of our future education standards and requirements.



Our next steps

Decision and readiness

The ESR will not address some matters which are outside the legal powers of the GOC, although we know they are of interest to many of our stakeholder. The areas that are out of scope include; optical and wider health workforce planning, NHS contractual requirements and funding flows within the optical sector, funding of course programmes, patient pathways and referrals, and optical business models.

However, we do recognise that there may be an indirect impact within these areas arising from the outcome of the Review and vice versa and, together with relevant stakeholders, we will take into account the impact of this.

We aim to make good progress in delivering the Review, to ensure our education standards and requirements remain in step with the optical and wider health sector needs and developments.

This means we are committed to conducting the Review thoroughly and efficiently. We also know that education providers and the wider optical and health sector will need time to prepare for any changes. We will make sure that all stakeholders have adequate time to get ready and implement any new education standards and requirements.

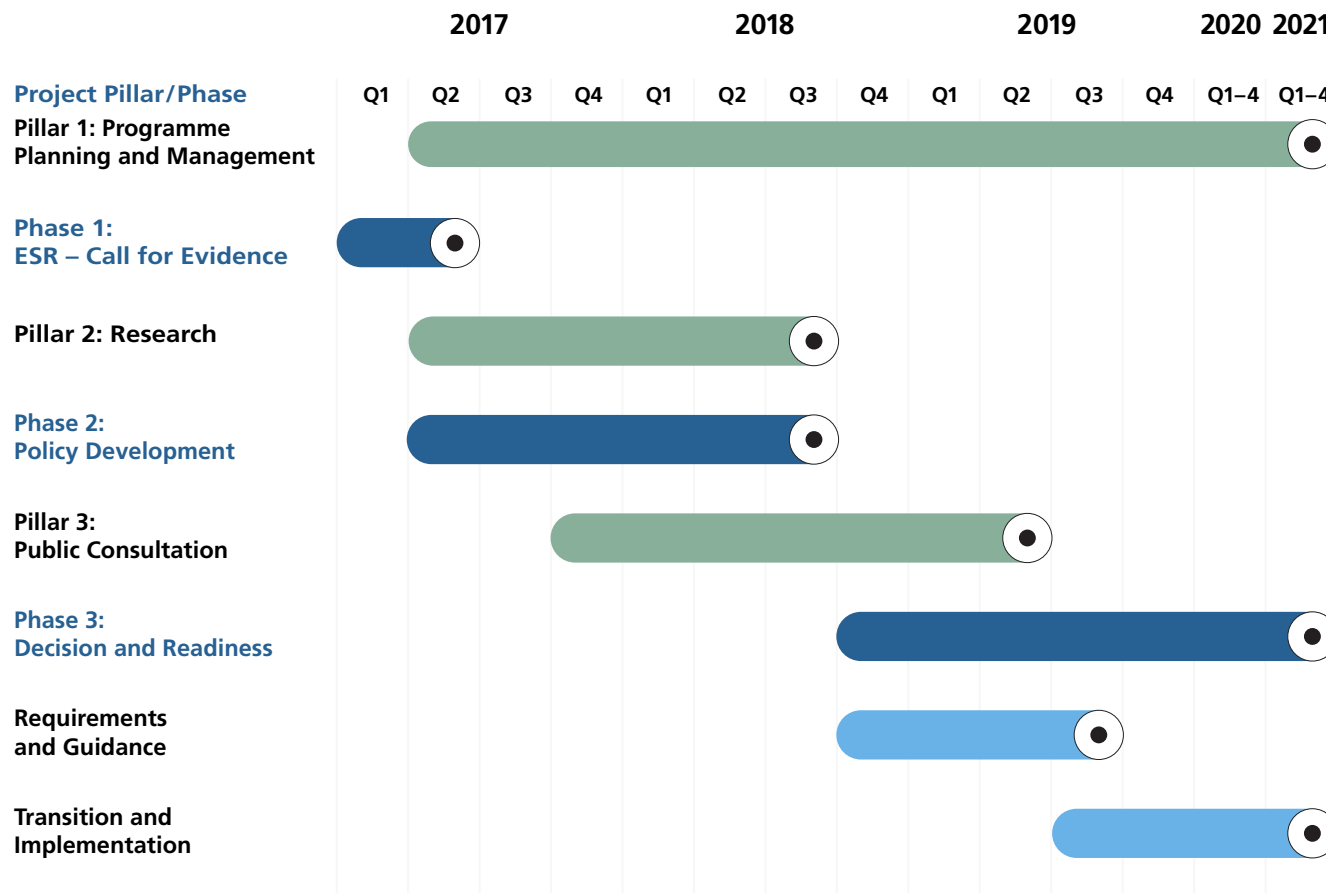


Indicative timeline

Below is a high level indicative timeline for the Education Strategic Review. This may be subject to change, but it is in step with the delivery of our [GOC Strategy 2017-20](#).

Education Strategic Review

Indicative Timeline



For more information about our Education Strategic Review visit www.optical.org/en/Education/education-strategic-review/