

GOC/COVID/01

Date of statement: 19 March 2020

GOC statement on education provision during the COVID-19 emergency

1. Along with all other healthcare regulators, the GOC has signed a [joint regulatory statement](#) which acknowledges that registrants will need to act differently and deliver care in different ways during the COVID-19 emergency in line with Government and public health guidance. The GOC will take account of this in fulfilling its regulatory functions along with the following statement in response to questions from education providers about what changes to education delivery the GOC will allow.

Patient, student and staff safety

2. The health of patients, and patient safety is our first priority. Students, staff and others must manage their own health, where that impacts on others. That means not attending teaching sessions or assessments when sick, and self-isolating if required to do so. This is particularly important when staff and students are in a clinical environment.
3. If students or staff are on placement or working in clinical environments and have pre-existing health conditions that place them at increased risk of infection, they should discuss this with their education provider.
4. Education providers, employers and contracting bodies should take all necessary steps to make sure that those who are learning or working in clinical environments are suitably equipped (for example, with protective clothing) and have the right information to minimise the risk of transmission.
5. Government guidance for healthcare professionals and organisations can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>. Government guidance for education settings can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19>.

Changes to education delivery

6. All GOC-approved qualifications must be delivered in line with GOC education standards as outlined in our [Approval and Quality Assurance handbooks](#).
7. The GOC will be flexible and pragmatic in its approach during the COVID-19 emergency and recognises that education providers will be working with their institutions, their regulatory bodies, national qualification organisations and professional associations in considering what changes might be needed to ensure continued provision of GOC approved qualifications.
8. The current situation will bring significant challenges for education providers in supporting students and staff to adapt to different and/or remote teaching and assessment methods, whilst also maintaining GOC standards.

9. For Optometry, in planning changes to provision, providers, students and their employers may find it useful to refer to the [joint message from the Optometry Schools Council \(OSC\) and College of Optometrists](#) on supporting final-year students' progression to the Scheme for Registration.
10. As institutions make changes to their provision to ensure the safety of staff, students and patients, education providers are asked to keep us in touch with reportable events and temporary changes ([as per our usual guidance](#)). This includes changes to the mode of delivery of teaching and assessment of their programmes. Providers should document any changes they make and update us using the following email address; education@optical.org.
11. Providers are reminded that as long as the standards outlined in our Approval and Quality Assurance handbooks are met, providers need only *notify* us of changes made. If changes to provision mean GOC standards may not be met, providers are asked to *alert* us at the earliest opportunity. Depending on the level of risk posed by the proposed changes, we will make separate arrangements with the provider to formally consider and if appropriate approve changes on a temporary/ time limited basis.
12. We recognise that students may not be able to receive clinical teaching and assessments in clinical locations, and that teachers, other staff and students may be off sick or self-isolating. Where possible, we'd ask education providers to:
 - a. prioritise the teaching and assessment of final year students;
 - b. work with partners to make appropriate contingency arrangements.

The GOC will keep this statement under review

13. Next routine review due: not later than 30 April 2020