

GOC standards framework

Standards of the General Optical Council

The General Optical Council (GOC) is the regulator for the optical professions with statutory responsibility for setting standards for optometrists, dispensing opticians, optical students and optical businesses. Our Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians, and our Standards for Optical Students, set out the standards of behaviour and performance we expect. Our Code of Conduct for business registrants sets out standards we expect of those businesses which are registered with us.

Our new approach to standards – reflected in both the standards of practice for optometrists and dispensing opticians and the standards for optical students – is to bring together in one place, and in an easy-to-digest format, all the information registrants need to understand our expectations. The standards provide clear statements of what we expect, explaining what registrants ‘must’ do. However, the standards are designed to provide room for registrants to use their professional judgement to decide how to apply the standards in any given situation. They may want to refer to guidance produced by professional bodies and other organisations in doing so, but the GOC’s standards should always be the first point of reference.

We recognise that this is a change from the previous situation, where the high-level nature of the GOC’s Code of Conduct meant that registrants often referred to guidance produced by the professional bodies and other organisations to more fully understand the standards they should meet as opposed to how to apply them. However, our new standards are designed to address this issue by making clear our expectations as the regulator and making clear that the role of guidance produced by professional bodies and other organisations is to help registrants use their professional judgement in applying our standards.

Supplementary material published by the General Optical Council

It is important for the standards to make clear our expectations and so we have made them as self-contained as possible. However, in some cases, to enable registrants to fully understand the standards they must meet we will provide some supplementary material. Registrants will need to read the standards in conjunction with any such supplementary material.

The GOC may need to produce supplementary material to, for example:

1. address issues that are relevant to all healthcare professionals, such as consent and duty of candour (often in response to a direction from Government or recommendations from the Professional Standards Authority);

2. explain legal requirements which are complex or confusing in nature, such as regulations on the sale and supply of optical appliances or the use of medicines);
3. address issues arising persistently in fitness to practise cases; or
4. provide clarity in circumstances where third party guidance is conflicting.

Guidance provided by other organisations

It is important that all registrants are clear about the standards they must meet. Our standards, and any supplementary material, will be designed to provide such clarity.

In considering concerns about a registrant's fitness to practise we will refer to our standards and any supplementary material that we have published.

Other organisations including professional bodies and employers, may choose to produce guidance that can help registrants to use their professional judgement in applying the standards set by the GOC.

The guidance provided by such organisations defines their own expectations of their members or employees and may be more detailed than that issued by the GOC. It is likely to be of particular value in providing guidance on issues relating to clinical practice where registrants may seek more detailed material to assist with their clinical decision making.

The GOC does not have control over the material produced by others but we will seek to work with other organisations to ensure that the guidance they produce is compatible with our standards.