

bulletin

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Regulation reforms promise 'Trust, Assurance and Safety'

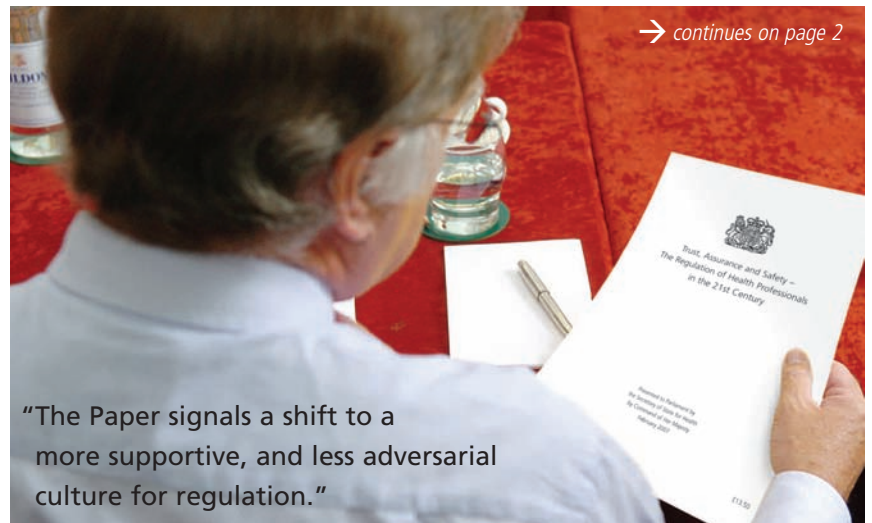
by Kate Fielding

Government plans promise a system for professional regulation which will be fair to practitioners and patients, and promote confidence in health professionals.

The long-awaited White Paper, *Trust, Assurance and Safety*, was published on 21 February. It recognises the crucial role regulators play in fostering and maintaining a system of safe, high quality healthcare in the UK and endorses the fundamentals of the current approach.

Regulators will continue to set standards for education and conduct, quality-assure professional education, maintain publicly-available registers of professionals, and deal with complaints about poor performance or conduct. The principle of making public safety the overriding concern is reaffirmed.

Proposed reforms aim to ensure that the regulators are independent, accountable to parliament, and able to take account of changes in society and public expectations. The Paper also signals a shift to a more supportive, and less adversarial culture for regulation. The health secretary's introduction states: 'professional regulation should be as much about sustaining,



→ continues on page 2

"The Paper signals a shift to a more supportive, and less adversarial culture for regulation."

Student retention deadline looms

The GOC are reminding all registered students to apply for retention before they leave university for the summer holidays. The deadline for applications is 15 July.

Optometry and dispensing optics students must complete and return a retention form, and the £20 fee. As *Bulletin* went to press, 1,237 forms had been returned out of a total of 4,166, leaving 70 per cent of student applications outstanding.

Registration with the GOC is a legal requirement for optometry and dispensing optics students. Anyone who fails to return their form and payment by 15 July may be removed from the student register on 1 September. Those who pay now but decide not to continue with their course in September will receive a full refund.

Pre-registration students who renew now, but join the full register by 31 August will have their full registration fee reduced by £20.

Anyone who has not received their application form should contact the registration team on 020 7580 3898 (option 1), or download a copy from the website, www.optical.org.



In this issue

- New guidance on selling optical appliances
- Meet the lay members of Council
- CET first cycle report
- The lowdown on business registration

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“The arguments made by the GOC for a proportionate approach have been heeded.”

Regulation reforms promise ‘Trust, Assurance and Safety’

improving and assuring the professional standards of the overwhelming majority of health professionals as it is about identifying and addressing poor practice or bad behaviour’.

The arguments made strongly by the GOC and others for a proportionate approach, recognising differences in risk, have been heeded. Across the board, there is a commitment to avoiding unnecessary burdens.

Commenting on the proposals, GOC chairman Rosie Varley said: “This White Paper signals an end to a long period of uncertainty for the regulation of healthcare professionals. For the first time since the conclusion of the Shipman Inquiry two years ago, we have a clear policy framework. Many of the proposals in the White Paper are an endorsement of the GOC reform agenda

which has strengthened our role in public protection.”

At its meeting on 22 March, the Council agreed to seek an opportunity for early legislation to put in place a new Council structure, in line with government recommendations. The new GOC would have a maximum of 13 members, to allow for more effective decision-making. All members would be appointed and there would be at least as many lay members as professional members.

Registrar Peter Coe said: “We have a great opportunity to move forward with our vision to be a trusted, modern regulator. Changes to the Council structure will actually open up new ways for stakeholders, including registrants, to get involved with our work. We will be consulting closely with the professions, our partners and the public to develop our plans.”

The White Paper: what does it mean for you?

- The Council will be smaller, with at least as many lay members as professional members. Members will be independently appointed.
- Fitness to practise panels will use the civil standard of proof, flexibly applied. In practice, this will mean that in the most serious cases, where a registrant may be ‘struck off’, the standard of proof required will be very close to the criminal standard. But there will be more flexibility to take appropriate action to protect the public where it is needed.
- Councils must separate adjudication (hearing fitness to practise cases) from their role in investigating and prosecuting complaints. The GOC already has an independent hearings panel. In the long term, cases may be heard by an independent adjudication body, ensuring consistency and best practice across all the healthcare regulators.
- The GOC will develop plans for revalidation of optical professionals. Arrangements will need to enable registrants to periodically demonstrate their continued fitness to practise in a simple, cost-effective way. The success of the GOC CET scheme will provide a strong foundation to build on.
- All regulators will need to consider student registration. The GOC will continue to work closely with education and training providers and student registrants to ensure that professional standards, attitudes and behaviours are an integral part of optical professional education.

Message from the Editor

When we asked lay members of Council what the biggest challenge was facing the GOC at the moment, nearly all of them mentioned the challenges thrown up by the new White Paper on healthcare regulation. They talked about the need to get the balance right, not only to implement proposals in a proportionate way, but also to keep the rest of the Council’s critical work moving forward.

This issue of *Bulletin* has faced a similar challenge. We have led with the Council’s response to the White Paper, but we’ve also tried to keep you up to date with some of the other things that have been happening at Harley Street. Amongst the mix, we report on new professional guidance for selling powered and plano contact lenses, and delve into some of the figures coming out of the first cycle of statutory CET.

I hope you feel we’ve struck the right balance.

Kate Fielding, Editor



Peter Coe, Registrar

Message from the Registrar

Many of you will be aware that the Government published its White Paper on healthcare professional regulation in February.

The White Paper is a real endorsement of the

Council’s achievements and direction of travel. The GOC will continue to set and maintain standards for optical education and conduct, register qualified professionals and ensure their continued fitness to practise. And we will continue our work to modernise the framework of optical regulation. The steps we have taken to separate investigation and hearings functions, and to introduce student registration give us a significant head start.

At its meeting in March, the Council agreed that we should fully seize the opportunity to put in place more effective structures, by making our governing body smaller and more ‘board-like’.

We will be working out the detail of the changes over the coming months. As we develop our policies and approaches, proportionality and practicality will be at the forefront of our minds. Registrants will have

a critical part to play in making sure that new systems are fair, and will work ‘on the ground’. We will also be consulting closely with colleagues in government, employers, educators, optical professional and representative bodies and other regulators, as well as members of the public and patients, for whose benefit we are all working.

The other major event of the past few months has been the end of the first cycle of compulsory CET. The outcome has been a fantastic result for the professions. The overwhelming majority met – and surpassed – CET requirements without any difficulty. It has sent a clear message to the public that optometrists and dispensing opticians are committed to keeping their knowledge and skills up to date and to maintaining the highest standards of care.

Furthermore, we now have in place the foundations for professional revalidation to be developed from the strength and success of our CET scheme.

This issue of *Bulletin* includes an update on both these critical areas, and a wide range of other issues. As ever, we welcome your comments and suggestions about any aspect of our work.

New guidance on sale and supply

By Jon Levett, Director of Standards

The College of Optometrists and the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO) have issued revised guidance on the sale and supply of powered and zero powered contact lenses. Revised guidance on the sale and supply of spectacles will also be issued shortly. The move follows the GOC's clarification of the legal requirements set out in the Opticians Act in a statement in October.

Opticians Act regulations restrict the sale or supply of spectacles, contact lenses, and zero powered contact lenses to ensure that patients receive appliances appropriate to their needs by requiring the involvement of registered optometrists, dispensing opticians, or doctors.

Both the Council and the professional bodies are advising practitioners involved in the sale and supply of spectacles, contact lenses, and zero powered contact lenses to urgently familiarise themselves with the guidance, and ensure their own practice complies.

The guidance clarifies the level of oversight needed when selling or supplying different types of appliance, and what is expected of a practitioner who is 'supervising' or 'generally directing' sales.

Legal advice obtained by the GOC confirmed that the Act clearly distinguishes between contact lenses and zero powered contact lenses. Powered contact lenses can be supplied under the general direction of a registered optometrist, dispensing optician or doctor. The person supplying the lenses must have a written specification (or verified copy or order) issued after a registered optometrist, contact lens optician or doctor has fitted

"The Council and the professional bodies are advising practitioners to urgently familiarise themselves with the guidance, and ensure their own practice complies."

the lenses, and the sale must meet some other conditions.

The provision for general direction does not apply to zero powered lenses which may only be sold by, or under the supervision of, a registered optometrist, dispensing optician or doctor.



Spectacles can also only be sold by, or under the supervision of, a registered optometrist, dispensing optician or doctor (unless exempted under Section 27(2) of the Act or the Sale of Optical Appliances Order 1984).

The revised guidance issued by the College and ABDO gives further details of the professional obligations for optometrists and dispensing opticians when supplying or selling optical appliances themselves, when supervising a sale, and when a sale of contact lenses is made under their general direction.

Registrants supervising the sale or supply of an appliance must be able to intervene and exercise their professional skill and judgement. The guidance includes clarification that in order to be able to make a clinical intervention, the supervising optometrist or dispensing optician should be on the premises when the sale is made.

Where contact lenses are sold under the general direction of a registered person they are not required to be able to intervene, but must be in the management chain and accountable for any sale made under their general direction. The guidance emphasises the importance of putting robust procedures in place to ensure that patients receive the contact lenses on the written specification. It also highlights the need to ensure that the seller makes appropriate arrangements for the patient to receive aftercare when supplying contact lenses and zero powered contact lenses, and what this aftercare should include.

The guidance can be found at – www.abdo.org.uk or www.college-optometrists.org.

GOC issues registration cards

The GOC are issuing all fully registered optometrists and dispensing opticians with a registration card. The cards are being sent out with this issue of *Bulletin* and are designed to serve as a handy, wallet-sized reminder of the GOC number and contact details.

Each card is printed with the registrant's name, GOC number, registration category (optometrist or dispensing optician), and the next registration renewal deadline. Contact details for Vantage and the GOC are also included on the cards.

Practitioners can also show the card to patients or employers, who can check current registration details on the Council's website.

Providing they keep their registration up to date, every full registrant will be issued with a new card on a yearly basis, following the annual retention deadline in March. If an optometrist or dispensing optician is removed from the registers for any reason, they must return their registration card to the GOC.

Student registrants will be issued with registration cards at the start of the 2007-8 academic year.

Fully registered optometrists or dispensing opticians who have not received their registration card with this issue of *Bulletin* should contact the GOC registration team on 020 7580 3898 (option 1).



In Brief – news from Council

White paper implementation

At its 22 March meeting, Council agreed to propose reducing its size to a maximum of 13 members. The move is in line with the government's White Paper recommendation that regulatory governing bodies become more 'board-like'. Members agreed that a smaller Council will allow for more effective decision-making. It was also agreed that a project board would be formed to lead and coordinate the implementation of the White Paper. Four work streams will feed into the board, dealing with work within the themes of: 'governance', 'revalidation', 'tackling concerns', and registration.

Election of deputy chairman and treasurer for 2007

Council members re-elected Geoff Harris and Moira Black as deputy chairman and treasurer, respectively. The deputy chairman's duties involve presiding over Council meetings in the absence of the chairman. The treasurer supervises the income and expenditure of the Council. Both positions will be held for one year.

Rosie Varley to serve as CHRE chair

GOC chairman Rosie Varley will serve as interim chair of the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence (CHRE). This follows the decision of Jane Wesson to step down from the role. A permanent chair will be elected once the Appointments Commission have recruited a new lay member of CHRE Council.

Communications strategy

Members noted the updated communications strategy at the March meeting of Council. Objectives for the next 12 months include a maintained focus on registrants and internal audiences, whilst improving communications with external stakeholders. The redesign and relaunch of the Council's website is another key area of development. Pixl8 have been appointed to supply a content management system that will support the new website.

Next meeting

The next meeting of Council will take place at 10.30 on Thursday, 28 June 2007 in London. Council meetings are open to the public. If you would like to attend please email echambers@optical.org.

Who's Who on Council?

Lay members take the *'The Bulletin Questionnaire'*.



Name: **Rosie Varley**
Age: **55**
Lives: **Bury St Edmunds**
Career: **Originally a health economist, but for many years a member and chairman of boards in the health, regulatory and voluntary sectors.**

What is the biggest challenge for the GOC at the moment?

Implementing reforms to professional regulation in ways that are sensitive and proportionate to the optical sector.

What has been your most rewarding moment?

Professionally, probably the opening of a new hospital in Newmarket in 1996, which was a controversial project I had led to successful completion. It makes me very sad now to see excellent services being withdrawn from that same hospital.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

I have learnt to count my blessings, to take each day as it comes, and not to spoil the joy of the moment by fear of the unknown. It is important to keep a sense of humour, a sense of the ridiculous, and a sense of proportion.



Name: **Moira Black**
Age: **57**
Lives: **West London**
Career: **Long career with Price Waterhouse, being the first woman to be admitted to the partnership in the London office. Since my withdrawal from the partnership in 1993 I have had a variety of appointments, mainly in the public sector. Currently chairman of North West London Hospitals NHS Trust, non-executive director of Defence Equipment & Support, independent director of the Payments Council.**

Why did you want to become a GOC Council member?

I thought it would be interesting given my background in other forms of regulation.

What is the biggest challenge for the GOC at the moment?

Changing in order to meet the challenges of new approaches to regulation.



Name: **David Pyle**
Age: **63**
Lives: **East Yorkshire and London**
Career: **I began as a primary school teacher, before entering teacher education, eventually becoming pro vice chancellor of Manchester Metropolitan University. I'm now an education inspector and consultant.**

Why did you want to become a GOC Council member?

I first got involved with the GOC as an education visitor ten years ago before being appointed as the Council's education adviser. It seemed like a natural step, given my experience.

What is the biggest challenge for the GOC at the moment?

Implementing the White Paper proposals in a way which recognises the centrality of the educational function of Council. In education, the European dimension is a key challenge, as well as the establishment of the new dispensing optics courses, and embedding the new scheme for registration in optometry.

What do you do in your spare time?

I'm a keen gardener and DIY enthusiast, and the pianist for my local choir. I also like to get away to my apartment in Nice and a part-owned house in Normandy.



Name: **Morag Alexander**
Age: **63**
Lives: **Edinburgh**
Career: **Researcher, journalist, various public appointments including director of the Equal Opportunities Commission, Scotland, and convener (chair) of the Scottish Social Services Council.**

Why did you want to become a GOC Council member?

In my time at the Scottish Social Services Council, the issue of professional regulation has grown in significance; I wanted to use my understanding of appropriate regulation in another important professional area.

Which person living or dead would you most like to have dinner with and why?

My husband; we are both so busy we sometimes pass on the stairs, so dinner together would be a novelty.

What is your greatest fear?

That I will one day recognise that there are only 24 hours in the day.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

Listen to the advice of others, especially those who are both wise and fun, but make decisions based on your own values and principles.



Name: **Geoffrey Harris**
Age: **57**
Lives: **Buckinghamshire**
Career: **Medical research; HM Diplomatic Service; International business.**

What is the biggest challenge for the GOC at the moment?
Reform: balancing remedy to risk.

Which person living or dead would you most like to have dinner with and why?
David Hume: to consider life, the universe and everything.

What has been your most rewarding moment?

Getting married.

If you could introduce a new law, what would it be?

Proportional representation.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

Nothing is as it seems.



Name: **Sheila Wild**
 Age: **57**
 Lives: **Manchester**
 Career: **Director of employment policy, Equal Opportunities Commission.**

Why did you want to become a GOC Council member?
Five years ago I was diagnosed with epi-retinal membrane. The GOC offers me the opportunity to combine my background in regulation with my personal experience of being a user of eye care services.

What is the biggest challenge for the GOC at the moment?
Protecting the public within a regulatory framework that was devised before present day challenges. The pace of change is so fast that regulation can't keep up with it, yet the public – quite rightly – expect it to do so.

What is your idea of perfect happiness?
Either a concert at the Wigmore Hall or a beach in Northumberland.

What is your greatest fear?
Spiders!

If you could introduce a new law, what would it be?
That all laws should be subject to review every ten years with a view to bringing them up to date within two years.



Name: **Mike Salmon**
 Age: **70**
 Lives: **Essex**
 Career: **Originally an economist, followed by a period in the airforce, then went into higher education, finally setting up Anglia Polytechnic (now Anglia Ruskin University) and becoming vice chancellor. I've advised a number of governments on vocational higher education and been a board member and chairman for NHS Trusts.**

What is the biggest challenge for the GOC at the moment?
Implementing the White Paper and determining our role in the UK and Europe. To protect the public interest, the GOC needs to take a lead in setting education and professional standards, to ensure that people coming to work in the UK are qualified to the same standard.

Which person living or dead would you most like to have dinner with and why?
Nelson Mandela and Tunku Abdul Rahman (the founder of modern Malaysia). I've been fortunate enough to meet both, and I admire them hugely. Both have been totally committed to racial harmony in countries which could be very divided.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?
Humility.



Name: **Stuart Heatherington**
 Age: **57 (but appear older according to daughter)**
 Lives: **West Sussex but aspirations to retire back to the north**
 Career: **Originally a mathematician in civil engineering computing. Various director roles since (commercial company, voluntary organisations, NHS Trust chairman, GMC).**

What is the biggest challenge for the GOC at the moment?
Implementing the provisions of the government White Paper whilst

continuing to do the day job of protecting, promoting and maintaining the safety and well being of the public and retaining the confidence of both the public and the professions.

What has been your most rewarding moment?
Becoming a dad.

What is your idea of perfect happiness?
Sitting in a pub with my wife enjoying a well-earned pint of bitter having together conquered Everest – or at least one of the smaller peaks in the Lake District.

GOC at Optrafair and BCLA

Over the weekend of 21-23 April GOC staff and members met delegates at Optrafair 2007. The Council took their place at Birmingham's NEC, alongside hundreds of other exhibitors including optical bodies, spectacle manufacturers and charities.

Continuing Education and Training (CET) provided the theme for the GOC stand, as a new series of CET target group logos were showcased to registrants.

CET Scheme Manager, Louise Morris from Vantage, was on hand to explain the new requirements. "With so many people here to get a head start on their points for the new cycle, it's the perfect time for us to get practitioners checking that CET is approved for their target group," she said.

This month the GOC also headed north to exhibit at the BCLA clinical conference in Manchester. Registrants took the opportunity to debate policy matters with Council members, whilst others sought clarification on registration and legislation.

Council member, David Cartwright, was positive about the events' value: "Our presence has given us the chance to meet everyone from students to overseas practitioners. As well as offering a 'one-stop shop' for things like registration, we've been able to listen to peoples' views on the issues affecting the profession."



Louise Morris and Peter Coe met delegates at Optrafair 2007

Hearings report

Director of Legal and Fitness to Practise, *Caroline Withall*, reviews the recent cases.

Fitness to practise hearings this year have all been against registered optometrists. In January, **Edward Hopkins** was found guilty of misconduct for sending abusive letters to a third party, posing as one of his patients. The Fitness to Practise Committee found that his behaviour was an impairment to fitness to practise, and fined him £1,250. The Committee commented that 'the public are entitled to expect registrants to behave in an honest and trustworthy manner.' Their decision indicates that any action which brings the profession into disrepute can amount to an impairment of fitness to practise.

Simon Morelli was found guilty of deficient professional performance and erased from the register in February. He had systematically recorded carrying out certain clinical tests, when in fact he had not done so, and the equipment needed to conduct the tests was not available. The Committee were satisfied that his actions compromised patient safety sufficiently to warrant the erasure order.

Also in February, the Committee ordered its second conditional registration against **Neil Carter**, whose patient had suffered a retinal detachment. The conditions set focused on training in the use of slit lamps, and attendance at retinal clinics. The order was not punitive in intent, but intended to encourage the registrant to train in areas where he was falling short of a reasonable level of competence. The Committee sent out a clear message that every practitioner is expected to be able to use a slit lamp as part of the eye examination.

In March, **Anthony Jones** was found guilty of deficient professional performance for note keeping which 'fell well below the standard expected of a reasonably competent optometrist'. The judgment reinforced the importance of detailed record keeping. The Committee commented that 'the Council considers maintenance of full, comprehensive and contemporaneous records to be a most serious matter'. Mr Jones' practice was not found to be impaired.

In another decision, the Committee stressed the importance of maintaining professional registration. **Samir Patel** was found guilty of misconduct and was found to be impaired as a result of failing to keep his registration up to date. The Committee stated that 'registration and continuation of membership of the profession is a fundamental requirement. Mr Patel has demonstrated a basic disregard of this important requirement. The public interest and safety is not protected by such disregard'.

In April, the Committee heard a matter against **Carol Sinclair** and **Martyn Allen**. The facts of the case were not found proven, excepting that Mr Allen was found guilty of deficient professional performance for failing to carry out intra-ocular pressures. The Committee stated, 'failure to carry out an IOP examination on a patient over 40 years of age would be to fall below the standard of a reasonably competent optometrist.' However, the Committee accepted evidence that Mr Allen ordinarily carried out such screening, and did not find that a single incident led to impairment.

The Committee heard two applications for Interim Orders. An application for an order against **Naftali Bastien** in February was not granted. Although concerns about record keeping were noted, the Committee were not satisfied there was a patient safety issue based on the evidence available at that time. In relation to student optometrist, **Nathan Hill**, the Committee granted an Interim Order for suspension for 18 months as a result of a public order charge against Mr Hill, and his suspension from university. Both cases will be the subject of a full hearing in due course.



Register your specialty

The GOC is warning practitioners with a specialty qualification that they must not practise that specialty until they have registered it with the Council. Those who do are jeopardising their careers.

If a registrant performs specialist work without the appropriate entry in the register, the Council may treat this as evidence of impaired fitness to practise. There are currently three specialty registers:

Specialties for -

Optometrists
Additional supply specialty
Supplementary prescribing specialty

Dispensing opticians
Contact lens specialty

Practitioners with any of these specialties entered against their name on the register are entitled to perform additional duties to those of a normal optometrist or dispensing optician.

To register a specialty, individuals must complete an *application for entry of a specialty* form and return it to the GOC, together with a copy of their qualification certificate. There is no fee to register a specialty. Practitioners must indicate that they wish to renew their specialty as part of the normal retention process.

Individuals with a specialty entry must earn one Continuing Education and Training (CET) point for each two full months of specialty registration, up until 31 December 2009 in addition to the general CET requirement. Points are needed for each registered specialty.

Application forms are available at www.optical.org. Or call the GOC registration team on 020 7580 3898 (option 1).

CET figures show high uptake

by Kate Fielding

The GOC reported in April that over 98 per cent of registrants had met the requirement for Continuing Education and Training (CET). Figures just released from the first three-year cycle now show that most are achieving well beyond the minimum points requirement.

Optometrists are the most likely to clock up extra points, with 52 confirmed points on average, whilst dispensing opticians earned and confirmed an average 41 points. Contact lens specialists are also likely to go above and beyond, with an average of 50 general and 26 specialist points. The figures include new registrants and restorers, who need less than the minimum requirement of 36 general points and an additional 18 points for specialists, suggesting that some will have done far more.

Over three years, well over three quarters of a million points were entered onto the www.cetoptics.com system. Nearly 37,000 points – more than two points for every registrant – were not confirmed.

There was plenty of CET on offer, with 280 registered CET providers submitting around 6,500 events for approval. Provision was significantly higher in some competency areas than others. Contact lens practice CET was most plentiful, with over 800 events run, followed by optical examination and technique, and ocular abnormalities. These subjects were also the most popular. Optical examination and technique topped the board with nearly 240,000 points awarded to registrants, slightly ahead of contact lens practice, with just over 200,000 – more than three times as many points as third placed ocular abnormalities.

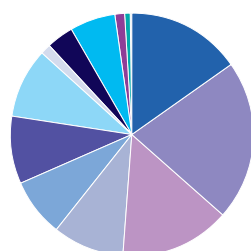
Other than prescribing specialties, the least well covered competency was low vision, with just five events available and 142 points awarded. There was also low uptake for binocular vision courses, with fewer than 500 CET points awarded in this competency.

Lectures were the most common form of provision, with nearly 3,500 available. Registrants could also choose from 880 workshops, 241 peer review events and 131 distance learning articles.

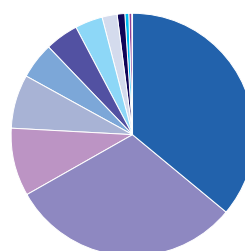
The highest uptake was for text based distance learning, which accounted for just over 60 per cent of points awarded. Lectures and skills workshops were next in the popularity stakes, at around 30 per cent and seven per cent of points respectively. No points were awarded for poster sessions, although there were three events approved.

Information from the first cycle report will be used to help with planning the present CET cycle and future development of the scheme.

Competencies



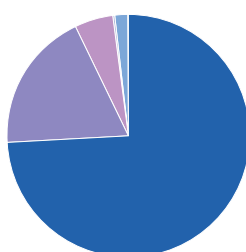
Provision



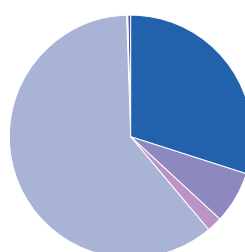
Uptake

- Optical examination and technique
- Contact lens practice
- Ocular abnormalities
- Optical appliances
- Contact lenses
- Communication skills
- Ocular examination
- Refractive management
- Visual function
- Professional conduct
- Additional supply competencies
- Binocular vision
- Low vision
- Supplementary prescribing competencies

Modality



Provision



Uptake

- Lecture
- Skills workshop
- Peer review
- Text based distance learning
- Visual recognition test
- Video based distance learning
- Poster session

Make sure CET hits the target

You will only be credited with points for events which have been approved for your 'target group'. The target group(s) should be clearly marked on all CET advertising or publicity material. You can also check the target groups for any event on the CET directory at www.cetoptics.com.

Retention removals reach three-year low

Removals from the GOC registers at the end of the last retention period reached their lowest number in three years.

The GOC removed a total of just 602 optometrists and dispensing opticians from its registers, along with 50 bodies corporate. Of this number, 319 individuals – fewer than two per cent of registrants – were removed for failing to meet Continuing Education and Training (CET) requirements. Specialty entries were removed from the names of 15 registrants who failed to obtain the requisite number of specialty points.

The figures compare with 905 removed in 2006, and 751 removed in 2005, representing a significant reduction in numbers coming off the register, despite the additional requirement for CET in 2007.

Registrar Peter Coe commented: "This is a fantastic result for the professions. The overwhelming majority have met CET requirements without any difficulty. Such a strong response sends a clear message to the public that optometrists and dispensing opticians are committed to keeping their knowledge and skills up to date and to maintaining the highest standards of care."

The list of practitioners removed from the registers was sent to primary care organisations and professional bodies in April. To date, 186 have restored to the register.

It is illegal to practise as an optometrist or dispensing optician in the UK without being registered with the GOC. Bodies corporate who are not registered may not use or associate any protected titles with their company names.

Bodies corporate: the heart of the matter

Can't tell your limited companies from your protected titles? We quizzed *David Henley, Hearings Manager*, for some answers...



What is a body corporate?

A body corporate is a business that has been incorporated by Companies House, and is enrolled on the Council's register.

Which businesses need to register with the GOC?

By law, if you are using a protected title (see box) in either your business or trading name, you must register that company with us as a body corporate. If you are not using a protected title, but you fit into any of the categories listed below, you are free to register your company but it is not compulsory.

Who is entitled to register?

You need to fit into one of the following categories:

- the majority of company directors are registered optometrists and/or dispensing opticians;
- your business was included on a local health service ophthalmic list at 20 November 1957;
- the majority (over 50%) of your company's profits are earned from business other than testing sight and/or dispensing AND those activities are managed by a registered person;
- your business is a co-operative society.

How do I apply?

If you want to use a protected title complete an *Application for Registration (Bodies Corporate)* form (you can download one at www.optical.org) and return it to us along with payment, leaving the 'company registration number' and 'date of incorporation' sections blank. On receipt, providing that your application has been correctly completed, we send you a letter of authorisation which you can send to Companies House. They will incorporate your company using the protected title and you then send us a copy of the incorporation certificate. At this point, we can add your business to the body corporate register. If you are not using a protected title as part of your company

name, you can get your company incorporated first then send us your application for registration.

What if I am not a registered optician but own a practice?

You may still run a practice but you will not qualify as a body corporate. You cannot refer to yourself or your business using any of the protected titles. You should consult your primary care organisation about 'grandfathering' arrangements.

What does it cost?

The body corporate registration fee is currently £169. You will need to pay a retention fee each year to maintain your registration.

What are the common mistakes?

When applying under the 'majority of directors' category, shareholders and ownership percentages have nothing to do with it! It just comes down to a physical majority of directors. For example, if a company has only one director, who is registered with us as an optometrist or dispensing optician, it would qualify for body corporate registration. You must also remember to pay for your individual registration as well as the body corporate fee.

If you still have questions about the application process, contact the registration team on 020 7580 3898 (option 1).

Protected titles:

(Registered) optometrist
(Registered) dispensing optician
(Registered) ophthalmic optician
(Registered) optician(s)
Optical
Contact lens(es)

UPDATE

Independent prescribing

The Government is expected to decide whether optometrists will be able to independently prescribe therapeutic drugs in the next few weeks. The Commission for Human Medicines, which advises ministers on such matters, is expected to meet this month, with a decision from ministers shortly afterwards.

The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency and the Department of Health consulted last year on proposals to enable optometrists to become independent prescribers. The consultation invited comment on several options for the range of conditions and drugs for which optometrists, with relevant specialist training, should be able to independently prescribe (see Autumn 2006 *Bulletin* for details).

The GOC in its response to the consultation supported independent prescribing for optometrists. If Government gives the go-ahead, the GOC will work with the Department of Health to put in place relevant changes to the legislation. The Council will also work with optometry education establishments and the College of Optometrists to ensure that training and accreditation is available in the full range of specialist competencies.

Which? highlights allergy risk

The February edition of *Which?* magazine highlighted the case of Muriel Bankhead, who experienced a painful allergic reaction to nickel in her spectacle frames.

Nickel is a common contact allergy, affecting around ten per cent of women and one per cent of men. Once sensitised by exposure to nickel, sufferers are more likely to develop allergies to other substances.

Strict regulations govern the use of nickel in products such as spectacles which are in contact with the skin. However, nickel can become exposed when coatings wear away or frames are damaged.

Her experience led Muriel to call for optometrists and dispensing opticians to ask patients about reactions to jewellery before recommending glasses, telling *Which?*, 'I wouldn't want anyone else to suffer what I went through'.

Got a view?

Have your say by emailing us at bulletin@optical.org or writing to:

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