

## From unmet to met – how the General Optical Council improved its performance to ensure that anybody can raise a concern about its registrants

### REVIEWING REGULATORS' PERFORMANCE IN PRACTICE



#### Background

During 2016/17 the General Optical Council (GOC) introduced a new triage

process. Triage in this context is a way to filter out concerns that cannot be taken forward by the regulator. Our review identified concerns in 13 out of 45 cases examined. The GOC therefore failed to meet Standard One of the fitness to practise standards – anybody can raise a concern about the fitness to practise of a registrant.

#### Why does it matter?

We found issues in nearly a third of the sample of triage cases we reviewed. We had no reason to think our sample was not representative. If the same rate of errors occurred across all the GOC's triage decisions – including any potentially serious concerns about GOC registrants, there would be an increased risk to the public and to the public's confidence in the optical professions.

#### What did the GOC do to address our concerns?

After it failed to meet this Standard, the GOC made changes to its triage process as well as developing a new quality assurance measure. These included:

- ▶ recruiting new staff (a Triage Officer and Senior Triage Officer)
- ▶ making changes to its triage process 'case plan'
- ▶ implementing Acceptance Criteria
- ▶ amending its referral form to make it easier to understand.

The GOC also developed quality-assurance measures about when to and when not to open a case at the triage stage.

These have included:

- ▶ a recommendation by the Triage Officer
- ▶ a decision by the Senior Triage Officer
- ▶ a right to request a review (to be reviewed by the Director of Casework)
- ▶ a review by an Investigations Manager when opening a full investigation
- ▶ a sample control check of decisions not to open a case
- ▶ an independent audit of a sample of decisions.

#### What difference has this made?

We carried out a targeted check to see what improvements had been made for the GOC's most recent performance review. We examined 25 cases closed at this stage in the fitness to practise process and found that the concerns we had identified had been addressed:

- ▶ a formal triage decision had been fully recorded
- ▶ the triage decision was sufficiently reasoned
- ▶ the triage decision demonstrated that all aspects of the complaint had been considered.

We also did not identify any cases closed where there was not a good reason to close them; or that significant issues of the complaint had not been considered. The GOC has made positive changes to its triage process to address our concerns and ensure that potentially serious issues around a registrant's fitness to practise were not being missed. The GOC plans to carry out an audit about how it is using its Acceptance Criteria. We will look at this as part of our next review.

#### Find out more



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