



Snapshot

Annual review of performance



Regulator reviewed: **General Optical Council**

Key facts & figures:

- regulates the practice of **optometrists, dispensing opticians, students and optical businesses** in the **United Kingdom**
- **21,334** professionals on register (as at 30/09/2016)
- **£330** annual fee for registration (as at 01/04/2017)

Standards of good regulation

Core functions

Annual performance review 2016

Met

(number of Standards)

Guidance & Standards

4/4

Education & Training

4/4

Registration

6/6

Fitness to Practise

8/10

Find out more about our performance reviews at:
www.professionalstandards.org.uk/performancereviews

Focus on: **Activities and actions demonstrating how the GOC is meeting the Standards**

The GOC has met 22 out of 24 of our Standards of Good Regulation and this represents an improvement in the GOC's performance since last year.

GUIDANCE AND STANDARDS: REFLECT UP-TO-DATE PRACTICE AND LEGISLATION AND PRIORITISE PATIENT/SERVICE USER SAFETY AND CARE

The GOC introduced revised Standards (which came into effect on 1 April 2016). These Standards differentiate between students and registrants. The GOC wanted the Standards to reflect the different context for students and not place unfair and unrealistic expectations on them. Both sets of Standards include a new duty for professionals to be candid when things go wrong.

REGISTRATION: EVERYONE CAN EASILY ACCESS INFORMATION ABOUT REGISTRANTS

The GOC did not meet this Standard last year – during our checks on their register we found six entries containing errors on fitness to practise sanction information. The GOC has since updated its processes and made improvements. These include: instigating additional checks before publishing registrants' details, quality-assuring information on the register to check its accuracy, monthly checks by the Registration and Fitness to Practise teams on interim orders, conditions and suspensions recorded on the database, and random sampling of open fitness to practise investigations. These changes have had a positive impact on the register's accuracy and we found fewer errors during our check for this performance review period, and concluded that the Standard has been met.

GUIDANCE AND STANDARDS: ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE HELPS REGISTRANTS

The GOC published new guidance to help registrants raise concerns about risks to patient safety. *Raising concerns with the GOC (whistleblowing)* was published in February 2016.

FITNESS TO PRACTISE: CASES ARE PRIORITISED/DEALT WITH AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE

The GOC failed to meet this standard last year and it is still taking too long to progress fitness to practise cases. As well as the increase in the time taken to progress cases, we were also concerned to see an increase in the number of older cases which has more than doubled during our review period. We recognise the GOC's efforts to address these issues, including introducing a triage system, conducting investigative work earlier on in the process, and recruiting additional staff and new expert clinical witnesses to try to prevent delays. We anticipate that these measures will have an impact over the next year, but have not yet contributed to an improved performance so we concluded that the GOC has not met this Standard for 2015/16.

FITNESS TO PRACTISE: INFORMATION ABOUT FITNESS TO PRACTISE CASES IS SECURELY RETAINED

The GOC has experienced four data breaches during this review period. These breaches consisted of five cases where patient records were sent to the wrong practice/provider after an investigation; 17,000 registrant home/practice addresses were provided to a data sales request; and sensitive information about one registrant's fitness to practise was sent to another registrant. These breaches were reported to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Though, the GOC is taking steps to improve its performance, including training staff, we consider that the breaches are too serious for the GOC to meet this Standard. However, we hope to see an improvement for the next review period.

The full report is available from our website. It covers the GOC's performance from 1 April 2015 to 30 September 2016.