

General Optical Council

Performance Review
Periodic review 2021/22

General Optical Council

Performance review report 2021/22

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About our performance reviews

We have a statutory duty to report annually to Parliament on the performance of the 10 regulators we oversee. We do this by reviewing each regulator's performance against our [Standards of Good Regulation](#) and reporting what we find. Our performance reviews are carried out on a three-year cycle; every three years, we carry out a more intensive 'periodic review' and in the other two years we monitor performance and produce shorter monitoring reports. Find out more about our performance review process on our [website](#).

This is a periodic review report on the General Optical Council (GOC) and covers 1 October 2021 to 31 December 2022.

About the GOC

The GOC regulates the optical professionals in the United Kingdom. It has 30,189 professionals and 2,884 optical businesses on its register (as at 31 December 2022).

About the GOC's performance for 2021/22

For this review, the GOC met 18 out of 18 of our Standards of Good Regulation. These Standards provide the benchmark against which we review performance. Meeting or not meeting a Standard is not the full story about how a regulator is performing. Our report provides more detail about the GOC's performance this year.

Standards of Good Regulation met 2021/22		
	General Standards	5 out of 5
	Guidance and Standards	2 out of 2
	Education and Training	2 out of 2
	Registration	4 out of 4
	Fitness to Practise	5 out of 5
	Total met	18 out of 18
	Standards met 2019-21	
	2020/21	17 out of 18
	2019/20	16 out of 18

Key findings

Fitness to practise

We have been critical of the time it has taken the GOC to progress cases through its fitness to practise system for a number of years. However, the GOC has maintained the improvements in timeliness we saw last year, and its performance now compares favourably against the other regulators. We recognise the work that has gone into making these improvements and are pleased to report that the GOC has met Standard 15 this year. The GOC continues to identify opportunities to improve, and has an ongoing programme of work that should positively affect the timeliness of its fitness to practise processes.

Communications and stakeholder support

Although much of the feedback we received from stakeholders this year was positive, we did receive some critical comments about how the GOC had handled the implementation of two major projects: the new Education and Training Requirements (ETR); and the new Continuing Professional Development (CPD) system. We were also told about the impact that delays to removals at the end of the 2019-21 Continuing Education and Training (CET) cycle had on registrants.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

We have seen the GOC demonstrate its commitment to issues around EDI in a number of ways again this year. It now has a comprehensive set of registrant EDI data going back a number of years, and has started collecting EDI data as part of its annual public perceptions survey; this data will provide the GOC with robust evidence from which it can draw informed conclusions and take appropriate action. We encourage the GOC to share good practice and lessons learned from its work in this area with other regulators.

General Standards

1

The regulator provides accurate, fully accessible information about its registrants, regulatory requirements, guidance, processes and decisions.

- 1.1 The GOC publishes information about its role and activities on its website, which it relaunched in December 2021. The new website has a clearer layout, easier navigation, more online forms and an improved search function. It is also easier to use on a wider range of devices, and is suitable for screen readers and large print – particularly important for those with sight problems. The GOC has a separate consultation hub which contains consultation papers and responses from the GOC dating back to 2018.

Conclusion

The GOC has improved the usability of its website, which continues to contain all the information we would expect to see. We are satisfied that this Standard is met.

2

The regulator is clear about its purpose and ensures that its policies are applied appropriately across all its functions and that relevant learning from one area is applied to others.

- 2.1 The GOC Strategic Plan 2020-25 states the GOC’s mission is ‘to protect the public by upholding high standards in the optical professions’. It has three strategic objectives: delivering world-class regulatory practice; transforming customer service; and building a culture of continuous improvement. The 2022/23 Business Plan set out the key projects, activities and milestones under these objectives.
- 2.2 We noted three examples of the GOC carrying out work in a way that demonstrated a clear focus on public protection this year:
- Publishing an updated Illegal Practice Protocol which clarified the GOC’s approach to concerns about businesses or individuals outside the UK.
 - Carrying out consultation and research around potential future changes to the Opticians Act and related GOC policies.
 - Publishing an exceptions policy for its 2019-21 Continuing Education and Training cycle, which clearly stated the primacy of public protection when considering applications from registrants.

Conclusion

The GOC is clear about its purpose and continues to focus its activities on public protection. We are satisfied that this Standard is met.

3

The regulator understands the diversity of its registrants and their patients and service users and of others who interact with the regulator and ensures that its processes do not impose inappropriate barriers or otherwise disadvantage people with protected characteristics.¹

- 3.1 The GOC continues to implement its EDI Action Plan 2020-24, which contains 27 actions under six themes: data; people development and education; recruitment; values setting; community and support; and leadership and accountability. The GOC has reported progress against these actions in its EDI Annual Report for 2021-22 – the first report in this format which provides welcome transparency around the GOC’s activities in this area. This report also sets out the GOC’s plans for work in 2022-23 and notes that it will renew its EDI Strategy in 2024.
- 3.2 During this review period we have seen the GOC demonstrate its commitment around EDI issues in a number of ways, including:
- Recruiting two individuals to the new role of Council Associate in March 2022. These roles do not carry voting rights but do offer opportunities for a wider range of views to be expressed at Council meetings, and provide experience for those looking to step into board, committee or panel roles in the future.
 - Improving its recruitment processes for new Council members, such as inclusive and accessible advertising, barrier-free sifting and selection processes, and ‘equalities proofing’ all advertising and candidate material.
 - Delivering an EDI learning and development programme, including providing training on bias to its Hearing Panel Members and Education Visitors.
 - Publishing two detailed Equality Impact Assessments on its proposals to update its post-registration speciality qualifications (discussed further under Standard 8 below).

EDI data

- 3.3 The GOC’s EDI Annual Report for 2021-22 contains its Data Monitoring Report for the same period. The GOC now has a comprehensive set of registrant EDI data going back several years which it can use to identify issues and inform its work.
- 3.4 The GOC has addressed a weakness we identified against this Standard last year by asking respondents to its annual public perceptions survey to provide EDI data. Of the 2,236 respondents to the 2022 survey, 70% provided EDI data, giving the GOC a robust evidence base from which it can draw informed conclusions and take appropriate action.
- 3.5 Data is the first of the GOC’s six themes in its EDI Action Plan, and the GOC has a number of activities planned to take this work forward, such as using data to

¹ We are currently reviewing our approach to assessing Standard 3 as part of our own organisational EDI action plan 2022/23.

explore issues around intersectionality, and collecting more qualitative data. We encourage the GOC to share good practice and lessons learned from its work in this area with other regulators.

Conclusion

The GOC has performed strongly again during this review period, and we are satisfied that this Standard is met.

4 | The regulator reports on its performance and addresses concerns identified about it and considers the implications for it of findings of public inquiries and other relevant reports about healthcare regulatory issues.

- 4.1 The GOC reports on its performance through its annual reports and accounts, which includes an annual fitness to practise report. As mentioned under Standard 3, the GOC also published its first EDI Annual Report in December 2022.
- 4.2 The GOC also publishes performance information each quarter in its Council papers, notably the Chief Executive and Registrar's report, the balanced scorecard and the business plan assurance report. We have observed detailed Council discussion of performance throughout the year. Council has also considered various consultation reports, surveys and other pieces of research, and provided challenge and support to management.
- 4.3 In our last two reports, we commented that the GOC should routinely publish the notes of its Advisory Panel meetings to ensure an appropriate degree of transparency. We are pleased to note that, in June 2022, the GOC committed to reporting the Panel's minutes to Council, and we are satisfied that this approach is proportionate.
- 4.4 The GOC receives relatively few corporate complaints; it told us that it received ten during this review period, none of which progressed to the final (third) stage of the complaints process. The number of corporate complaints being considered at stage two or stage three of the process are reported to the Audit and Risk Committee, but the GOC does not currently publish information about the volume or nature of corporate complaints; we suggest it considers doing this on at least an annual basis. The GOC was able to provide us with evidence of how it shares and applies learning from complaints, and we have not received any concerns that the GOC is failing to handle corporate complaints appropriately.
- 4.5 We have seen evidence of the GOC taking account of the findings of public inquiries in its work, for example in developing its Speaking Up guidance for registrants. The GOC has also carried out preparatory work in advance of possible future legislative changes, notably through its call for evidence and consultation exercise on the Opticians Act.

Conclusion

The GOC continues to report on its performance regularly and in appropriate detail. We have seen evidence of it taking account of public inquiries, government proposals for legislative reform and our own performance review work. The GOC does not publish data on corporate complaints, and we suggest it looks to do so. However, we have not received any concerns about this, and we are satisfied that this Standard is met.

5

The regulator consults and works with all relevant stakeholders across all its functions to identify and manage risks to the public in respect of its registrants.

- 5.1 The GOC carried out four major consultation exercises during this review period. Its consultation documents are generally clearly drafted and appear straightforward and simple to respond to. The GOC publishes detailed consultation reports which contain analysis of the quantitative and qualitative responses and set out the changes the GOC will make as a result.
- 5.2 One stakeholder told us that ‘consultation outcomes appear to be largely ignored where they don’t fit the GOC’s planned direction of travel’ and that ‘basing decisions on the proportion of submissions without any weighting for the organisational relevance and number of people they represent is statistically flawed.’ However, the consultation reports published by the GOC do split out the responses received from individuals and organisations, and we have not seen evidence of the GOC making decisions purely on the number of responses.
- 5.3 We received mixed feedback about how the GOC had handled the implementation of two major projects: the new Education and Training Requirements (ETR); and the new Continuing Professional Development (CPD) system.

What we heard from stakeholders



“The [ETR] implementation process has been well handled by the GOC with full engagement of the sector and Higher Education Institutions.”

“We remain concerned about the delays in providing sector communications in relation to the GOC’s new Education and Training Requirements.”

“The introduction of the new system of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) at the start of 2022 was not well-planned or communicated.”

-
- 5.4 We did receive positive comments about the GOC’s quarterly Defence Stakeholder Group meetings where fitness to practise issues are discussed. The

GOC was also praised for showing sector leadership by hosting monthly stakeholder workforce meetings.

- 5.5 The GOC also conducted three major surveys during this review period: an annual public perceptions survey; an annual registrant survey; and a stakeholder perceptions research survey. The GOC agreed a number of actions in response to the findings from these pieces of work.

Conclusion

As in previous years, we have seen evidence of the GOC consulting with stakeholders and carrying out several large surveys to inform its work. We have received some critical feedback from stakeholders on how the GOC has implemented the ETR and introduced a new CPD scheme, which the GOC will need to reflect on. We have also received some positive feedback about the GOC's willingness to engage with and lead the sector. We are satisfied that this Standard is met.

Guidance and Standards

6

The regulator maintains up-to-date standards for registrants which are kept under review and prioritise patient and service user centred care and safety.

- 6.1 As we noted last year, the GOC delayed work to review its standards because of the pandemic and to prioritise other strategic objectives. It has now completed its initial background research and is taking forward a co-production approach with stakeholders to draft a revised set of standards. The GOC hopes this approach will enable it to develop a richer understanding of various contemporary issues in the development and application of professional standards, such as the use of social media, the impact of locum working and the duty of candour. It plans to publish the revised standards for consultation in early 2024.

Conclusion

The GOC's standards for registrants are unchanged, and we have seen no evidence that they have become out of date. We will monitor the GOC's work as it prepares draft revised standards for consultation.

7

The regulator provides guidance to help registrants apply the standards and ensures this guidance is up to date, addresses emerging areas of risk, and prioritises patient and service user centred care and safety.

- 7.1 The GOC publishes guidance and position statements on a range of issues on its website, including current and previous guidance regarding the Covid-19

pandemic, as well as links to sources of information from the devolved governments and professional associations. During this review period the GOC published Speaking Up guidance for registrants to replace the previous whistleblowing guidance from 2016. The GOC made various amendments to the guidance, including improving the clarity of the drafting, adding a flowchart and providing more signposting to other organisations and sources of support.

Conclusion

The GOC continues to provide appropriate guidance to registrants, and we are satisfied that this Standard is met.

Education and Training

8

The regulator maintains up-to-date standards for education and training which are kept under review, and prioritise patient and service user centred care and safety.

- 8.1 As we noted last year, the GOC has recently updated its Education and Training Requirements (ETR) for GOC-approved qualifications for optometry and dispensing optics. Since March 2021, applications for new qualifications must meet a new set of requirements, which replaced the previous education handbooks for optometry (2015) and dispensing opticians (2011). Providers are currently adapting their existing courses to the new requirements.
- 8.2 During this review period, the GOC has replaced its handbooks for post-registration specialty qualifications.² In doing so, it followed the approach it had taken to replace its handbooks for optometry and dispensing opticians, such as consultation exercises (including focus groups with registrants and patients), literature reviews and EDI impact assessments, overseen by two Expert Advisory Groups. The GOC engaged the optical sector throughout the development process, and we have not received any comments from stakeholders about the content of the new requirements. The GOC expects most providers to work towards admitting trainees to approved qualifications that meet the updated outcomes and standards by September 2023.

Conclusion

The GOC has now finished updating its standards for education and training following a period of research, drafting, and consultation. Providers are now required to meet the requirements for all new courses, and are working to adapt their existing courses. We are satisfied that this Standard is met.

² Covering additional supply (AS), supplementary prescribing (SP) and independent prescribing (IP) categories, as well as new requirements for Contact Lens Opticians (CLO).

9

The regulator has a proportionate and transparent mechanism for assuring itself that the educational providers and programmes it oversees are delivering students and trainees that meet the regulator’s requirements for registration, and takes action where its assurance activities identify concerns either about training or wider patient safety concerns.

- 9.1 The GOC’s website clearly sets out the processes in place for the approval and quality assurance of optical education programmes in the UK. It also has pages dedicated to each education provider, detailing the courses on offer, their approval status, and links to the latest quality assurance reports.
- 9.2 The GOC gave full approval to four qualifications during this review period, in accordance with the process in place before the changes brought about by the Education Strategic Review. The GOC is supporting providers as they make the transition to the new Education and Training Requirements (ETR), including hosting quarterly meetings of the Sector Strategic Implementation Steering Group. It has a target that all currently approved qualifications will be adapted to the ETR by September 2025; we will continue to monitor progress.
- 9.3 We received some feedback suggesting the Education Visitor Panel (EVP) had not been consistent in applying requirements and conditions on education providers. The GOC told us that these issues arose from visits conducted several years ago, and set out the measures now in place to promote consistency and transparency, including: its quality assurance handbooks; its conditions management framework; its education decision making framework; monthly meetings of EVP Chairs; and post-visit feedback surveys. It is our assessment that the GOC has proportionate measures to reduce the risk of inconsistent decision making, and that decisions will need to reflect the specific circumstances of each qualification.
- 9.4 The GOC’s EVP has continued to carry out its programme of periodic QA visits. Most have been conducted remotely, although on-site visits have been used to inspect facilities or observe examinations. We have not received any concerns about the use of remote visits since they were introduced during the early months of the pandemic. We saw evidence of the GOC using its Serious Concerns Review process to carry out additional monitoring of providers to ensure its conditions are met. The GOC also told us it is looking to improve its Annual Monitoring and Reporting process so it can give feedback to providers more quickly.

Conclusion

The GOC has transparent and proportionate processes for approving and quality assuring optical education programmes. It is supporting providers as they make the transition to the new Education and Training Requirements. We are satisfied that this Standard is met.

Registration

10

The regulator maintains and publishes an accurate register of those who meet its requirements including any restrictions on their practice.

- 10.1 The appearance of the GOC's public register was refreshed as part of the GOC website relaunch in December 2021. The search facility is easy to use and provides various options for users to select.
- 10.2 In 2019-20, we noted two separate instances of the GOC adding individuals to the register who held qualifications from courses the GOC had not fully approved; these errors contributed to the GOC not meeting the Standard in 2019-20. We concluded the Standard was met in 2020-21 because we were satisfied with the steps the GOC had taken to address these issues. We carried out a targeted audit this year and were satisfied that the GOC's processes and controls were operating effectively to manage the risks we had previously identified.
- 10.3 We checked the register entries for 31 fitness to practise decisions during this review period and found one error, which the GOC promptly corrected. Although the register entry was not compliant with the GOC's disclosure policy, there was no risk to the public and we were satisfied with the GOC's actions to reduce the risk of similar errors occurring.

Conclusion

Our audit provides us with assurance that the GOC is appropriately managing the risks we identified in 2019-20. We identified one error on the register which did not present a risk to the public and we are satisfied with the GOC's actions to reduce the risk of a similar incident occurring. We are satisfied that this Standard is met.

11

The process for registration, including appeals, operates proportionately, fairly and efficiently, with decisions clearly explained.

- 11.1 Application numbers have increased as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has eased. The GOC has dealt with applications promptly, with a median processing time of 3-4 days for UK graduates, and 4-5 days for international graduates.

Conclusion

The GOC's registration processes have operated consistently well over the year, and we are satisfied that this Standard is met.

12

Risk of harm to the public and of damage to public confidence in the profession related to non-registrants using a protected title or undertaking a protected act is managed in a proportionate and risk-based manner.

- 12.1 The GOC has completed its work to update its Illegal Practice Strategy, which it last reviewed in 2015. As part of this work, it considered the findings of a literature review into the risks of illegal practice and the responses of its public consultation exercise. In June 2022, the GOC published a new Illegal Practice Protocol. This states that concerns about businesses or individuals outside the UK should be closed (or referred elsewhere) as they fall outside the remit of UK courts. It provides more detail about the initial assessment stage of the process, with the addition of acceptance criteria to decide whether an allegation falls within the scope of the criminal offences created by the Opticians Act. As we noted last year, we welcome the GOC's focus on its statutory remit in developing its updated protocol. We also note that the GOC encouraged the optical sector to provide evidence of harm from illegal practice as part of its call for evidence on the Opticians Act, as it considers future legislative reform.
- 12.2 We received one piece of positive stakeholder feedback about the GOC's willingness to challenge illegal practice, and we have no concerns about the way the GOC handles the complaints it receives.

Conclusion

The GOC has taken appropriate steps to update its understanding of the risks from illegal practice, and its new Illegal Practice Protocol provides greater clarity about how the GOC will consider allegations. We welcome the fact that the GOC has made its position clear that it will not pursue complaints against businesses or individuals outside the UK. We are satisfied that this Standard is met.

13

The regulator has proportionate requirements to satisfy itself that registrants continue to be fit to practise.

- 13.1 The 2019-21 Continuing Education and Training (CET) cycle closed on 31 December 2021, with 97% of registrants meeting the requirements. The GOC had intended to issue the statutory notice of removals letter on 15 March 2022 which would have allowed it to remove registrants by 8 April. However, the GOC was unable to carry out the necessary work on time and did not send out the removal letters until 4 April, meaning it did not actually remove registrants until 20 May. One stakeholder told us that this had caused 'significant distress, delays, and likely financial loss for some of [its] members', for example because they had unnecessarily taken unpaid leave or otherwise cancelled work in line with the GOC's original timescales. We are not aware of any actual harm to patients from this delay (and the risk is low), but the GOC should have handled the process better, particularly since there was so much time to plan for it. The GOC has told

us that it has conducted a lessons learned review to apply learning for the 2022-24 cycle.

- 13.2 We noted in our last review that the GOC had carried out a major review of its professional training requirements during 2020 and 2021; this resulted in the introduction of a new Continuing Professional Development (CPD) scheme from 1 January 2022. The new CPD scheme is less prescriptive and more flexible than the previous CET scheme: for example, registrants are now allowed to count CPD delivered by non-GOC registered providers (up to 50% of their points requirement); and established providers are no longer required to have individual CPD sessions pre-approved. The GOC published guidance on its systems of provider audit and registrant record review in August 2022, setting out its approach to CPD quality assurance. We do not have any concerns over the new approach to CPD, but we did receive feedback from stakeholders who were critical about the way the GOC implemented the change (as discussed in Standard 5).

Conclusion

The GOC has consistently met this Standard, and we have not had any concerns about either the previous CET approach or the new CPD scheme. We are therefore satisfied that this Standard is met.

Fitness to practise

14 | The regulator enables anyone to raise a concern about a registrant.

- 14.1 The GOC provides appropriate guidance and information for anyone considering whether to raise a concern against a registrant. It clearly explains the types of concern it can and cannot investigate alongside its acceptance criteria. It provides users with three options to take their complaints forward: an online form to raise a concern; a link to the Optical Consumer Complaints Service website; and links to other organisations who may be able to help (such as the Advertising Standards Authority, Citizens Advice, and organisations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland).
- 14.2 The number of concerns received by the GOC has increased as the pandemic restrictions have eased. There is no evidence from the data, or other sources available to us, that individuals have been unable to raise concerns with the GOC.

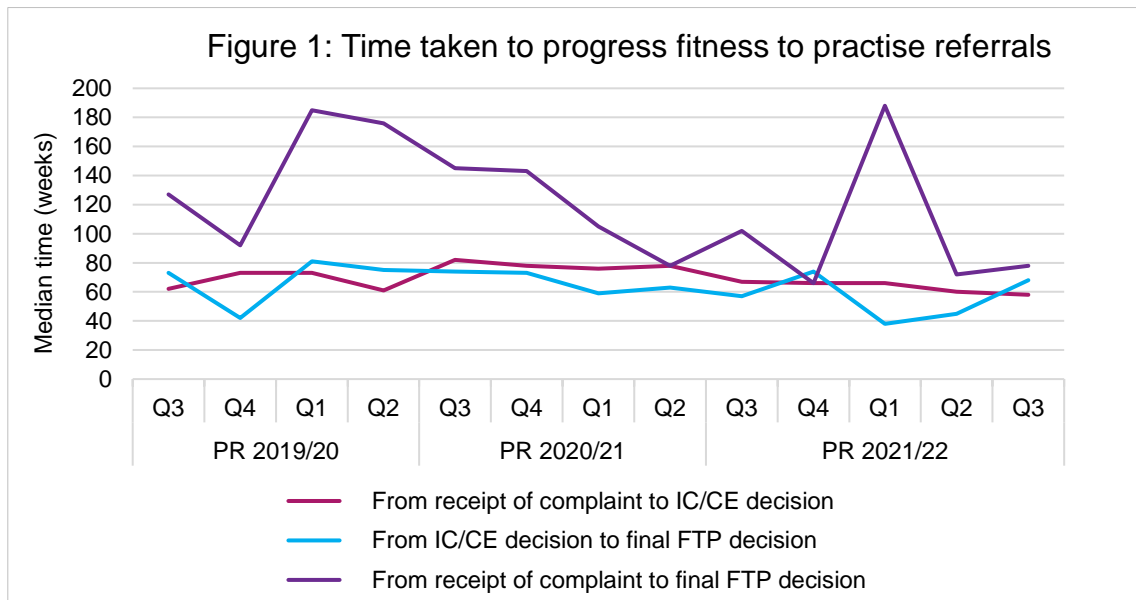
Conclusion

The GOC enables anyone to raise a complaint about a registrant and we are satisfied that this Standard is met.

15

The regulator’s process for examining and investigating cases is fair, proportionate, deals with cases as quickly as is consistent with a fair resolution of the case and ensures that appropriate evidence is available to support decision-makers to reach a fair decision that protects the public at each stage of the process.

- 15.1 The GOC did not meet this Standard last year because, despite bringing down the end-to-end timeliness measure and reducing the number of open older cases, it was still taking too long to conclude fitness to practise cases. This was the seventh consecutive year the GOC had not met our Standard relating to the timeliness of its fitness to practise process.
- 15.2 As Figure 1 below shows, the time taken from receipt of complaint to a final fitness to practise decision has improved from previous years, except for a significant spike in the third quarter of the review period; the GOC told us that only five cases were closed during that quarter, involving some of its oldest cases. Data from the other quarters indicates that the GOC has generally managed to sustain the improvement we saw last year. We did note a relatively high proportion of cases being adjourned at the fitness to practise committee stage; these can add significantly to the time taken to reach a final decision. The GOC has taken a number of steps to try and address this, including allocating more time to hearings, using that time more efficiently, and discussing the problem with panels and members of the defence stakeholder group. We will continue to monitor the data to see if these measures are successful.



- 15.3 Performance against our other two key timeliness indicators has also generally improved this year, although the time take for complaints to reach a decision by a case examiner or investigating committee is longer than most of the other regulators. The GOC told us that it has noted a significant increase in the number of cases involving health allegations, which can be difficult to progress because of unwell and/or disengaged registrants and the limitations imposed by the GOC’s

legislation. The GOC is examining ways to tackle the issue until the opportunity for more structural change which may be offered by legislative reform.

- 15.4 There has been a small increase in the number of older open cases this year, but we do not think it indicates a serious issue. The GOC reduced its open older caseload significantly during the 2019/20 review period and it has been broadly stable since then.
- 15.5 The GOC is implementing a 2022-25 Regulatory Operations Improvement Programme, which builds on the previous 2019-21 Fitness to Practise Improvement Programme. Although it does not have a specific workstream dedicated to fitness to practise timeliness, various other workstreams in the programme should have a positive impact, for example implementation of a more sophisticated case management system from summer 2023.

Conclusion

The GOC has maintained the improvements in timeliness we saw last year, and its performance now compares favourably against the other regulators. The GOC continues to identify opportunities to improve, and has an ongoing programme of work that should positively affect the timeliness of its fitness to practise processes. We are satisfied that this Standard is met.

16

The regulator ensures that all decisions are made in accordance with its processes, are proportionate, consistent and fair, take account of the statutory objectives, the regulator's standards and the relevant case law and prioritise patient and service user safety.

- 16.1 In 2019 and 2020 the GOC revised its acceptance criteria for opening new cases and introduced a new triage process. This was to avoid cases being progressed to case examiners unnecessarily. As part of our performance review this year, we conducted an audit of cases closed at triage to check that the GOC was not closing cases at that stage inappropriately.
- We found that the triage decisions were in line with the GOC's guidance and documented in sufficient detail to understand the reasoning; decisions were linked to relevant parts of the acceptance criteria and appropriately reviewed before the cases were closed.
 - Risk assessments conducted at the outset of a case were not fully documented unless the case was judged to be high risk; it was therefore not clear how most of those initial assessments were reached, though we did not consider that the assessments were clearly wrong.
 - We identified a small number of cases where complainants were no longer engaging but we thought the GOC could have done more work to investigate the concerns. However, we recognise the challenges posed by such cases and did not consider that serious public protection concerns were raised.

- We also concluded that the GOC did not make it sufficiently clear to complainants that there was an appeals process open to them.

The GOC has responded positively to our audit findings and has made, or is considering making, changes to its processes to address the issues we identified.

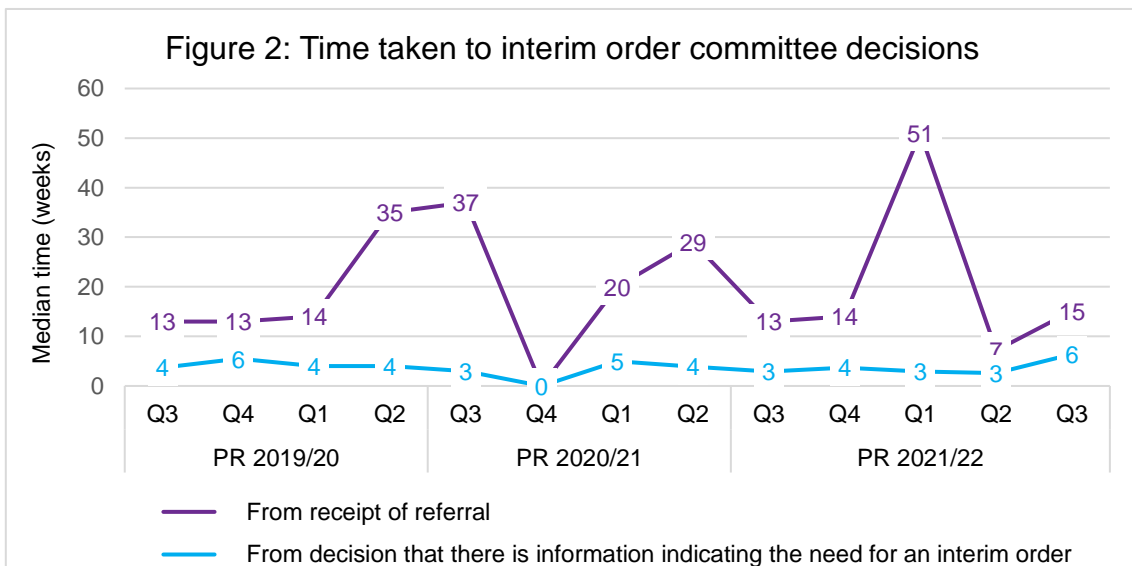
16.2 The number of cases progressing to a fitness to practise committee has been broadly consistent over the last four years, except for the low number last year – itself a likely consequence of the restrictions imposed during the pandemic. We have not seen any evidence to suggest that case examiners are closing cases inappropriately. We have also not identified any issues with the final fitness to practise decisions through our section 29 work.

Conclusion

We have no significant concerns about the GOC’s decision making in fitness to practise and we are satisfied that this Standard is met.

17 | The regulator identifies and prioritises all cases which suggest a serious risk to the safety of patients or service users and seeks interim orders where appropriate.

17.1 The GOC applies for very few interim orders each year. However, as can be seen in Figure 2, there was a significant increase in the median time from receipt of referral to the Interim Order Committee decision in the third quarter of this review period. There were three interim order decisions in this quarter: in two of those the GOC quickly progressed them to a hearing once it received new information that increased its assessment of risk. In the other case there were delays seeking and obtaining hospital records; the GOC has recognised that other aspects of the case could have been dealt with more quickly and has provided training to staff. Overall, however, we were not concerned that these cases revealed inherent problems in the GOC’s processes.



Conclusion

The GOC progresses cases promptly to interim order hearings and we are satisfied that this Standard is met.

18 | All parties to a complaint are supported to participate effectively in the process.

- 18.1 The GOC met this Standard last year with no concerns. This year, we have received positive feedback from stakeholders regarding the GOC's constructive engagement regarding the fitness to practise process, for example through its quarterly Defence Stakeholder Group meetings. In each quarter of this review period, the GOC has exceeded its KPI target to update at least 85% of fitness to practise parties every 12 weeks. It has also published the fourth and fifth editions of its FtP Focus newsletter which has aimed to demystify the process for registrants. The newsletter has covered the process from start to end, with the October and December 2021 editions covering the fitness to practise committee hearing itself.
- 18.2 We have not received any concerns relevant to this Standard, and are not otherwise aware of any negative feedback regarding the GOC's approach to hearings, or the support available to participants in other parts of the process. We did note areas for improvement during our audit of the triage process that are relevant to this Standard: these concerned the information the GOC provided to complainants when their cases were closed at triage. The GOC has taken appropriate action to address the issues we found.

Conclusion

The GOC met this Standard last year and we have received positive feedback from stakeholders regarding the GOC's constructive engagement in this area. The GOC has taken action to address the issues we identified during our audit of triage decisions, and we are satisfied that this Standard is met.

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for Health and Social Care
March 2023

