Corporate Safeguarding Policy

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1. Policy Statement

1.1. The General Optical Council (GOC) is committed to safeguarding the welfare of vulnerable people, including (but not limited to) staff, registrants, the public and young people. We recognise our responsibility to create a safe environment that promotes their well-being and protects them from harm. This policy outlines our commitment to ensuring effective and respectful communication with these individuals and advises on our safeguarding processes.

1.2. As a regulator, we have a mandatory duty to report any safeguarding concerns to the appropriate authorities, including local safeguarding boards or the police, in order to ensure the safety and well-being of vulnerable individuals in line with relevant legal and regulatory requirements.

2. What is Safeguarding and Who is at Risk?

2.1. Safeguarding is defined by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) as "protecting a person's health, wellbeing, and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect.

2.2. All people are potentially at risk of safeguarding issues, but some groups of people are particularly vulnerable to harm and exploitation.

3. Purpose

3.1. The purpose of this policy is to:

- Establish clear guidelines for safe communication with vulnerable individuals.
- Provide a framework for reporting and responding to safeguarding concerns.
- Enhance staff awareness and training to effectively support vulnerable adults and young people.

4. Our Safeguarding Commitments

4.1. Our safeguarding commitments are to:

- **Take prompt action** to protect the public where a safeguarding concern impacts the fitness to practise of an optical professional.
- **Work closely with other organisations** to refer or signpost individuals who may be at risk of harm.
- **Share information** with local safeguarding services, other regulators, government, and other agencies as necessary and appropriate to protect individuals from harm.
- **Adhere to national guidelines** for safeguarding and best practices.
- **Contact the police** without delay if there is an immediate risk of harm to anyone involved in the concern.
- **Train all staff** in safeguarding awareness as part of their induction relevant to their role.
- **Support staff** in knowing what to do if they receive information that suggests a safeguarding issue or observe a safeguarding incident.

- **Learn from past incidents**: Staff will engage in reflective learning sessions following any safeguarding incidents.

5. Principles of Safe Communication

5.1.   When communicating with vulnerable individuals, it is important you practise the principles of safe communication as set out by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities:

- **Respect and Dignity**: All communication should be respectful, treating individuals with dignity and compassion.
- **Clarity and Simplicity**: Use clear, straightforward language to ensure understanding. Avoid jargon or complex terms.
- **Active Listening**: Engage in active listening to validate individuals' feelings and concerns, ensuring they feel heard and valued.
- **Empowerment**: Encourage individuals to express their views and make informed choices regarding their cases and provide support.

6. Information Sharing and the Seven Golden Rules

6.1.   The Seven Golden Rules of Safeguarding were developed by the **Local Government Association (LGA)** in the UK, primarily as part of guidance for social care practitioners and organisations. They are designed to reflect best practices in safeguarding vulnerable individuals, ensuring that their rights are respected while providing necessary protections.

6.2.   These principles are often referenced in various safeguarding training programs and frameworks, including those related to child protection and adult safeguarding.

(1) Remember that the UK GDPR, Data Protection Act 2018 and human rights laws are not barriers to justified information sharing but provide a framework to ensure that personal information about living individuals is shared appropriately. For further information, please refer to our Freedom of Information Policy and our Data Protection Policy, which are on the GOC website in the "About us" section.

(2) Be open and honest with the individual (and/or their family/carer/representative where appropriate) from the outset about why, what, how, and with whom information will, or could be shared, and seek their agreement, unless it is unsafe or inappropriate to do so.

(3) Seek advice from your Information Governance team, if you are in any doubt about sharing the information concerned, without disclosing the identity of the individual where possible.

(4) Where possible, share information with consent and, where possible, respect the wishes of those who do not consent to having their information shared. Under the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 you may share information without consent if, in your judgement, there is a lawful basis to do so, such as where safety may be at risk. You will

need to base your judgement on the facts of the case. When you are sharing or requesting personal information from someone, be clear of the basis upon which you are doing so. Where you do not have consent, be mindful that an individual might not expect information to be shared.

(5) Consider safety and well-being. Base your information-sharing decisions on considerations of the safety and well-being of the individual and others who may be affected by their actions.

(6) Ensure that the information you share is necessary for the purpose for which you are sharing it, is shared only with those individuals who need to have it, is accurate and up to date, is shared in a timely fashion, and is shared securely.

(7) Keep a record of your decision and the reasons for it – whether it is to share information or not. If you decide to share, then record what you have shared, with whom, and for what purpose.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

7.1. **All Staff** must:

- Familiarise themselves with this policy and its procedures.
- Report any safeguarding concerns to the Safeguarding Panel promptly.
- Participate in regular training on safeguarding and communication practices.
- Understand their safeguarding duties and limitations
- Any safeguarding matters relating to a member of staff must be promptly reported to the People and Culture department to ensure appropriate action is taken. Examples of safeguarding concerns may include suspected abuse, bullying, harassment, sexual exploitation and grooming. It is crucial that these issues are addressed swiftly and in accordance to protect the well-being of all individuals involved.

7.2. Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are essential tools used to ensure the safety and welfare of vulnerable individuals. Certain staff members may be required to undergo these checks to verify their suitability for working with vulnerable people. This process helps to identify any past criminal behaviour that could pose a risk, thereby safeguarding those they encounter. By implementing DBS checks, the GOC is demonstrating our commitment to maintaining a safe environment and promoting trust within the community.

8. Training and Awareness

8.1. All relevant staff will receive training on safeguarding policies and effective communication with vulnerable individuals. Training could include:

- Recognising signs of abuse and potential harm.
- Responsibilities regarding safeguarding.
- Best practices for effective and empathetic communication.

9. Safeguarding Panel

9.1.   The GOC will implement a safeguarding panel who will play a crucial role in promoting the safety and well-being of individuals, particularly those who may be vulnerable.

9.2.   The panel's primary responsibilities include:

- reviewing safeguarding concerns
- ensuring that appropriate measures are taken to protect individuals from harm.
- provide guidance on policy development and training related to safeguarding practices.

10.   Monitoring and Review

10.1.   This policy will be reviewed every three years or as needed to reflect changes in legislation or organisational procedures. Staff feedback will be utilised to continually improve safeguarding practices.

10.2.   **Learning from past incidents**: The panel will reflect on lessons learnt following any safeguarding incidents, ensuring that any gaps or improvements in procedures are identified and addressed. This can include reviewing case studies, discussing key learnings from previous concerns or events, and incorporating feedback into future training programmes.

11.   Contact Information

11.1.   For any safeguarding concerns or inquiries, please contact the safeguarding panel on safeguarding@optical.org.

12.   Policy Implementation

12.1.   This policy is effective from 19 March 2025 and will be communicated to all employees and relevant stakeholders. Compliance with this policy is mandatory, and non-compliance may lead to disciplinary action.

12.2.   This policy should be read in conjunction with the internal process note for all GOC staff.

13.   Actions and Support

Concern	Details
Child abuse	- If the risk is not immediate, report child abuse to your local council. You can use the GOV.UK service finder to find the appropriate contact. - For advice on severity of abuse, contact the NSPCC helpline at 0808 800 5000.

	• Children and young people can contact Childline online or call 0800 1111. • Scotland: https://www.gov.scot/policies/child-protection/ • Wales: https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/reporting-abuse/reporting-concerns-about-a-child/ • Northern Ireland: https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/reporting-abuse/reporting-concerns-about-a-child/ • Refer to LADO depending on the local authority that the alleged offence has occurred in - https://national-lado-network.co.uk/the-role-of-the-lado-local-authority-designated-officer/
Abuse of an adult	• Reporting depends on where the adult lives and who cares for them. • For adults, report abuse to your local council using the postcode finder. • For elderly individuals, contact Hourglass at 0808 808 8141 (available Monday to Friday, 09:00 to 17:00). • For domestic violence support, contact the National Domestic Abuse Helpline at 0808 2000 247. • For emotional support, contact Samaritans at 116 123. • Scotland: https://www.gov.scot/policies/adult-support-and-protection/ • Wales: https://gov.wales/adult-protection • Northern Ireland: https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/adult-safeguarding
Reporting harassment and crimes	• If you're in danger or need urgent medical attention, call 999 or visit

	your nearest A&E department. For non-emergency situations, call 101. • For rape or sexual assault, seek advice from a sexual assault referral centre via GOV.UK. • Report hate crimes online through True Vision. • If you've been the victim or witnessed any crime, you can get specialist help on the government's victim and witness information website. • If harassment occurs at work, report it to your manager, HR, or trade union. For independent advice, contact the Equality Advisory and Support Service at 0808 800 0082. • If you're a woman experiencing sexual harassment at work, you can get free employment legal advice from the Rights of Women helpline on 020 7490 0152 (limited opening times).
Other sources of support	• https://www.anncrafttrust.org/help-advice/friend-relative/ • https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/safeguarding/steps-saferorganisation/recognise-respond-and-report/#/recognising-signs-of-harm-andabuse • https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect • Contact us - National Crime Agency
GOC resources	Contact People & Culture team for more information.
For staff	Employee Assistance Programme Mental Health First Aiders