

General Optical Council

UK Optical Education

GOC Approved Qualifications Report
2025



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Overview: the sector at a glance

GOC approved qualifications and Stage 4 applications:

Qualification type	Number of providers	Number of qualifications under handbook	Number of qualifications under ETR*
Optometry (OP)	16	22	15**
Independent prescribing (IP)	7	7	5***
Dispensing optics (DO)	7	12	5
Contact lens optician (CLO)	4	4	1

*Includes providers with full GOC approval already adapted to the ETR or at stage 4 of the staged application process who have been granted GOC approval to recruit to the qualification.

**Includes two quals combined Optom with IP

*** Standalone IP qualifications only, not including combined Optom with IP

Student Numbers

Total students	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
OP*	3,270	3,296	3,466	3,470
IP	435	521	415	N/A**
DO	763	783	960	1,139
CLO	66	59	89	N/A

*excludes those on College of Optometrist's Scheme for Registration due to different term period.

**The total number of IP students for 2024/25 is not available and will be disclosed in next year's AMR Sector Report.

Admissions to year 1	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25***
Optometry	1,056	1,039	1,114	1,201
Dispensing optics	319	346	338	316

***Registration data substitutes admissions data which will be supplied to the GOC later in 2025.

National Student Survey (NSS): Average scores by category in optometry, dispensing optics and subjects allied to medicine

	Optometry	Dispensing optics	Subjects allied to medicine
Teaching	91.5%	96.7%	84.8%
Learning Opportunities	88.0%	91.8%	82.3%
Assessment and Feedback	80.4%	92.6%	77.1%
Academic Support	89.1%	90.3%	81.0%
Organisation and Management	85.2%	78.6%	64.9%
Learning Resources	86.3%	93.7%	87.5%
Student Voice	79.9%	88.7%	72.5%
Student Union	77.6%	87.0%	74.7%

Average academic offer

UCAS Points	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
OP	136	134	136	134
DO	54	47	61.3	5 GCSEs (C+)

Average percentage of students exiting the qualification

Students exiting without graduating	2022/23			2023/24		
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Optometry	8.2%	4.4%	1.6%	6.3%	4.4%	1.4%
Dispensing optics	17.9%	4.4%	1.4%	4.5%*	1.3%	2.2%

* Largest DO provider

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Strengths • Steady growth in admissions to optometry qualifications whilst admissions to dispensing optics qualifications are stable. • Nearly all education and training providers have adapted to the ETR with most students about to progress into Year 2 or 3. • Entry grades for optometry remain competitive, with median offers equating to AAB at A-Level. • Significant progress achieved in the delivery of clinical placements as a result of the College of Optometrists' CLiP scheme and others in Manchester and Scotland. • Student satisfaction scores evidenced in the National Student Survey above subjects allied to medicine for most categories. • High attainment rates for both optometry and dispensing optics. • Strong sector collaboration in delivering the ETR, with SPOKE funding extended to 2028.	Weaknesses • Year 1 optometry progression has declined over a three-year period. • 20% fall in the number of IP trainees since 2022-23. • Four out of six IP qualifications yet to start teaching their first ETR cohorts. • Registrant survey found high levels of stress-related absence among optometry students. • No degree apprenticeship route for optometry. • Student feedback from GOC quality assurance activities is mixed on processes for actioning student feedback and for assessment feedback.
Opportunities • Significant increase in interest in new qualifications for both optometry and dispensing optics - new qualification providers could increase student numbers and widen participation. • Government 10-Year Health Plan for England aims to 'overhaul' education and training curricula over the next three years and will include 'comprehensive training in the use of AI and digital tools'. • ETR has provided opportunity to refresh qualifications aligning them with the Outcomes and introducing new content. • Models of delivering clinical learning and experience continue to develop, with sector partnerships such as Clinical Learning in Practice (CLiP) and provider-led partnerships with employers, charities, and government bodies. • First integrated optometry and IP programme in Scotland launched.	Threats • Challenging university finance context may begin to impact on optics qualifications. • Funding to be refocussed away from Masters level apprenticeships from January 2026 Secretary of State for Education announces. • New qualifications could have disruptive effect on the education provider landscape. • Uncertainty as to how long the College of Optometrist's Scheme for Registration will remain in place for optometrists graduating from pre-ETR qualifications. • Academic workforce shortages is a recurring concern with local competitors seeking to recruit amongst a limited supply of highly skilled staff. • Ongoing COVID legacy issues in terms supply of placements in IP and gaining the required case records in dispensing optics.

Introduction: The changing regulatory landscape

1. This year's UK Education: GOC Approved Qualifications Report reflects the continuous change in the education optics sector.
2. Nearly all education and training providers have adapted to the GOC's new education and training requirements (the ETR) for entry-level qualifications (see Table 1). These changes were introduced to ensure the qualifications we approve are fit-for-purpose, with the first ETR cohorts expected to graduate in the Spring of 2027¹. This is a date of real significance to the GOC; as previously announced, we will commission research to measure the effectiveness of the new requirements.
3. Now implementation of the ETR is advanced we are seeing significant interest in new qualifications in both optometry and dispensing optics with some providers aiming to welcome their first intakes in September 2026. Government funding decisions on apprenticeships are likely to increase qualifications in dispensing optics. However, progress in developing an optometry apprenticeship appears to have stalled over the last year.
4. Optical education needs to keep pace with changes in optical practice, including developments in technology. The Government's new 10-Year Health Plan for the NHS in England published in July, commits to working with professional regulators and educational institutions to 'overhaul' education and training curricula over the next three years to 'provide comprehensive training in the use of AI and digital tools' and 'promote acquisition and retention of generalist skills required for the Neighbourhood Health Service'². As a useful first step, healthcare regulators are coordinating a joint position statement on AI in education setting out some key guiding principles, due for publication in early 2026.
5. Change is also forthcoming concerning the GOC's registration process for international applicants. Following public consultation, the GOC developed two alternative routes to registration for such applicants including direct entry to the register (subject to final GOC checks), and successfully completing a GOC approved qualification which meets the ETR. The GOC has carried out an analysis of potential equivalent non-UK optometry qualifications and qualification systems to identify which could potentially offer direct entry. This analysis will be published shortly.
6. Staying on the theme of change, this year we have changed the format of the GOC Approved Qualifications Report to focus on five high-level outcomes that we wish to achieve. Our data analysis and commentary on sector developments are organised around each of these outcomes,

¹ ABDO dispensing optics students will sit their final assessments under the ETR in Summer 2026, and the graduation ceremony will be spring 2027.

² [Fit For The Future: 10 Year Health Plan for England](#), UK Government, July 2025, p100

rather than separate chapters for each eyecare profession, as was the case in previous years. We will continue to refine our approach for future editions of this report based on feedback received.

7. The five high-level outcomes are:
 - Outcome 1 – Sufficient students to meet patient needs
 - Outcome 2 – Qualifications equip registrants to deliver safe and effective eye care for all
 - Outcome 3 – High levels of student satisfaction and welfare
 - Outcome 4 – A strong, innovative and resilient sector
 - Outcome 5 – Post-registration qualifications support registrants to deliver a wide range of eye care services in communities.
8. Each outcome contains a series of metrics (such as numbers of applications and admissions etc). Data generally reflects the 2023/24 reporting year, however, where available and appropriate to use, more recent data for 2025 has been included, such as recent registration data. These metrics are supported by qualitative assessment as appropriate. Our basket of indicators is summarised in the graphic on page 11.
9. The report uses information from a range of sources, including information submitted by providers of GOC approved qualifications as well as GOC surveys, internal data and news about developments in healthcare and education from external organisations such as the UK Government and Office for Students.
10. This year, providers were asked to supply enhanced equality, diversity, and inclusion data in various areas including admissions, progression and attainment. This additional information reflects the PSA's strengthened expectations³ concerning Standard 3 introduced in 2019, which considers whether regulators understand the diversity of their stakeholders and ensure that their processes do not discriminate unfairly. A year-on-year comparison of the enhanced EDI information will be available once the data is published in full over the next two years.

³ [PSA strengthens approach to equality, diversity, and inclusion for healthcare regulators and Accredited Registers](#), PSA, June 2023

Table 1 – ETR adaptations / application status

Qualification type	Qualification provider	Adaptation/application status	Start date/TBC
Optometry	Anglia Ruskin University	Adapted	Sept-23
	Aston University	Adapted	Sept-23
	University of Bradford	Adapted	Sept-24
	University of Bradford – accelerated route	Not yet adapted	TBC
	Cardiff University	Adapted	Sept-23
	City St George's, University of London	Adapted	Sept-23
	University of Lancashire	Adapted	Sept-23
	Glasgow Caledonian University (with IP)	Adapted	Sept-24
	University of Hertfordshire	Adapted	Sept-23
	University of Huddersfield	Adapted	Sept-24
	University of Manchester	Adapted	Sept-24
	University of Plymouth	Adapted	Sept-23
	Teesside University	Adapted	Sept-24
	University of the Highlands and Islands (with IP)	Stage 4 application *UHI's submission is being managed as an application (UHI-OP-IP1-APP) due to the inclusion of IP which does not have GOC approval currently	Sept-25
	University of the West of England, Bristol	Adapted	Sept 24
	Ulster University	Adapted	Sept 23
Dispensing optics	ABDO	Adapted incorporating: ABDO College, Bradford College and City and Islington College (Capital City College) which are now ABDO teaching centres	Sept-23
	ABDO - Apprenticeship	Stage 4 application	Sept-24
	Anglia Ruskin University	Adapted	Sept-23
	University of Lancashire	Adapted	Sept-23
	Glasgow Caledonian University	Adaption in progress	Sept-26

Independent prescribing	Aston University	Adapted	Oct-23
	Cardiff University	Adapted	Sept-24
	City St George's, University of London	Not yet adapted	TBC
	Glasgow Caledonian University	Adapted	Jan-26
	University of Hertfordshire	Not yet adapted	TBC
	Ulster University	Adapted	Sept 27
Contact lens optics	ABDO	Adapted incorporating: Bradford College and ABDO College which are now ABDO teaching centres	Sept-24
	Anglia Ruskin University	Not yet adapted	TBC

Basket of indicators

High-level Outcomes	Indicators
Sufficient students to meet patient needs	• Applications numbers • Admissions numbers • Applications/admissions ratio • Average UCAS points offer • New GOC registrations • Attrition – % Year 1 students not progressing to Year 2 • Attrition – % students not completing qualification within single cohort • Attrition - % students exiting qualification in Year 1 • EDI – figures on admissions, progression and attainment for sex, age, ethnicity and disability
Qualifications equip registrants to deliver safe and effective eye care for all	• Registrant confidence in the education system • Attainment – % students getting a pass grade (required by the GOC) • % of business registrants providing pre-registration placements • % registrants being pre-registration supervisors • Employability - % graduates in work or study 15mths after graduation
High levels of student satisfaction and welfare	• National Student Survey scores • Negative culture - % students experienced harassment, abuse or bullying in last 12 months • Negative culture - % students experienced discrimination in last 12 months • Negative culture - % students reporting these behaviours • Negative culture - % students taking leave of absence due to stress in last 12 months
A strong, innovative and resilient sector	• Numbers of GOC approved qualifications • Quality assurance and enhancement activity - % ETR requirements assessed as met • Quality assurance and enhancement activity – number of conditions and serious concerns • Financial sustainability – commentary • Innovation – commentary • Risk analysis - commentary
Post-registration qualifications support registrants to deliver a	• % registrants interested in obtaining post-registration qualifications

wide range of eye care services	• % registrants holding post-registration qualifications • GOC registration numbers for contact lens opticians and independent prescribers • Numbers of IP and CLO trainees • Admissions numbers for IP and CLO • Attainment - % students achieving pass or higher • EDI – cohort data by sex, age, ethnicity, disability • EDI – progression from entry-level qualifications
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Outcome 1: Sufficient students to meet patient needs

Applications and admissions

11. The optical education landscape is changing with the ETR transition well underway, structural changes in education delivery including the introduction of degree level apprenticeships in dispensing optics, and the enhanced clinical role of optical professionals in the community.
12. A critical factor enabling the delivery of more routine community focused eyecare, helping to ease pressure on GPs and hospital eye services, will be the supply of a sufficient number of appropriately qualified optical professionals capable of delivering a range of care that reflects service redesign in all nations. Ensuring widespread geographical distribution, including in remote and rural areas of the UK, is also important.
13. It is not our role as a regulator to assess workforce capacity needs, although we have provided registration data to assist with such exercises. The ETR has removed caps on student numbers, so there are no longer any regulatory restrictions limiting the supply of future professionals.
14. Enhancing the attractiveness of careers in optics is a sector priority. Positively, application numbers remain strong⁴ and there is interest in setting up new qualifications in optometry and dispensing optics. At the end of July 2025, across all qualification types, 10 applications for new qualifications are in progress and there are other expressions of interest. If their applications are successful, there will be three additional providers beginning optometry qualifications in September 2026.
15. A comparison between admissions data from 2023/24 and student registration data from 2024/25⁵ (the closest comparable data) shows an increase of 7.2% in new entrants for optometry, and an increase of 6.5% for dispensing optics.
16. Previously, optometry has been cited as a fallback choice for candidates who unsuccessfully applied for other courses like medicine.⁶ In this context, the Government's plan to double the number of medical school places to 15,000 by 2031/32⁷ casts some doubt on the sustainability of year-on-year growth in student admissions. However, a new question in

⁴ Whilst there were 7,275 applications to optometry qualifications in 2023-24, and 408 applications for Dispensing optics it's important to note these are not unique applications with many individuals applying to multiple providers. The number of unique individual applicants is not available.

⁵ Provider admissions data for the next academic year (2024/25) is not available and GOC student registration data for the 2024/25 year 1 cohort is used instead as the closest comparable data. The provider data for 2024/25 will be available in next year's report.

⁶ SPOKE Project 3 Report on Admissions and Recruitment for optometry and dispensing optics qualifications, May 2023

⁷ [NHS Long Term Workforce Plan](#), June 2023, p18

the GOC's 2025 registrant survey suggests fallback choice is not a prominent factor being cited by only 6% of student optometrists and 4% of student dispensing opticians. Instead, interest in eyecare/health and helping people are the two biggest motivators for studying optics.

Optometry

- 17. Overall, optometry (OP) qualifications continue to report strong and growing admission figures (see Table 2). In 2024/25 there was a total year 1 student registration of 1,201 (compared to an admission of 1,114 in 2023/24). There remains a considerable range of small, medium, and large cohort sizes (see Chart 1). Meanwhile, the College of Optometrists' Scheme for Registration cohort comprised 968 students.
- 18. Across all OP qualifications, 36 international students were admitted (3% of all admissions).
- 19. Entry to OP qualifications has become more competitive this year. Education providers admitted an average of 17.9% (21.7% in 2022/23; 21.5% in 2021/22) of all applicants with a range of 7% to 31%.

Chart 1 – Year 1 optometry cohort by provider in 2024/25

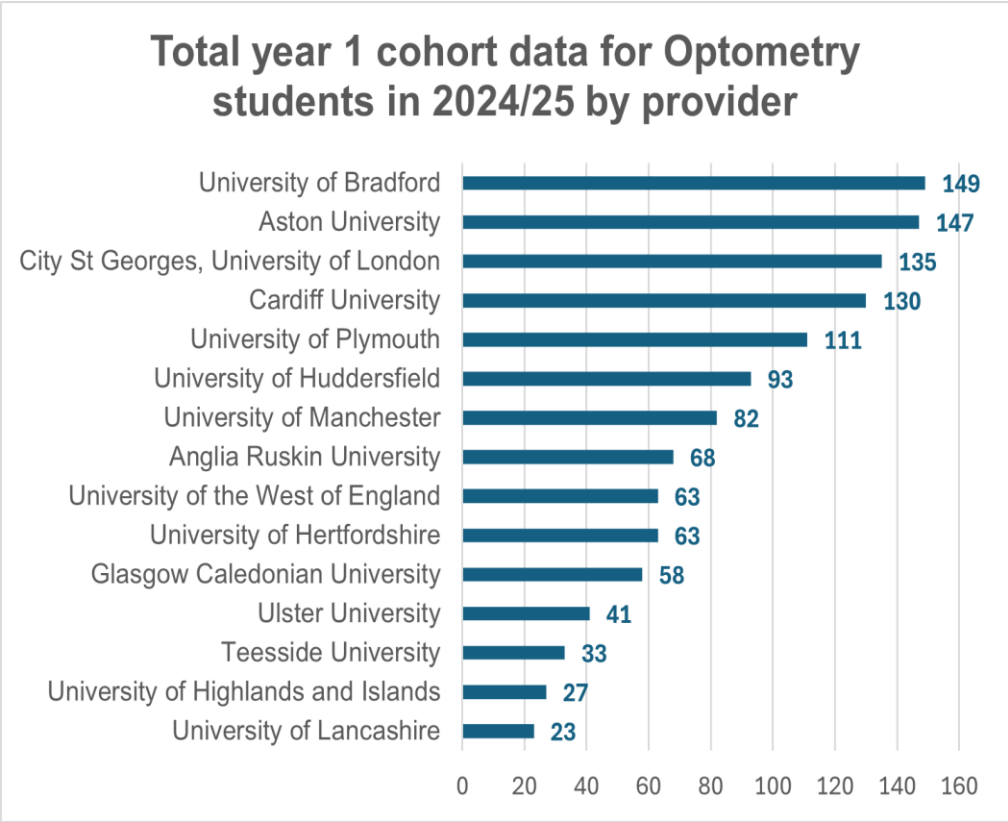


Table 2 – Optometry cohort and admissions

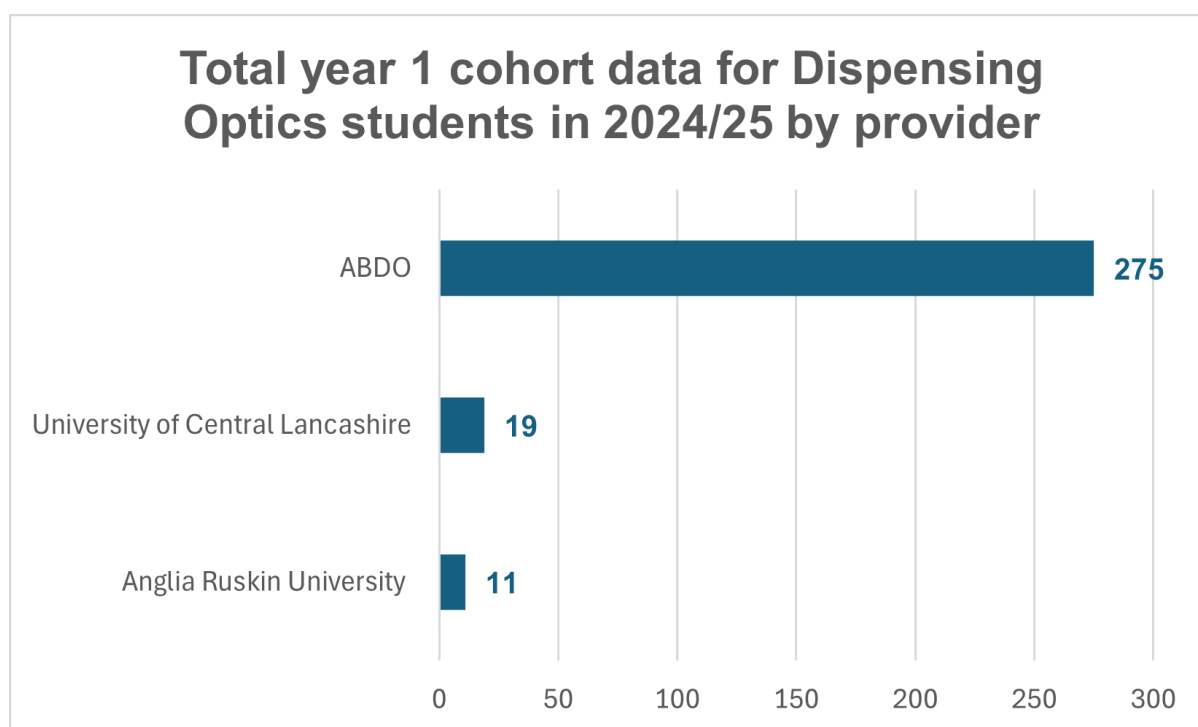
	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Total OP students	3,296	3,466	3,470
Year 1 admissions ⁸	1,039	1,114	1,201*

* Registration data substitutes admissions data which will be supplied to the GOC later in 2025.

Dispensing optics

20. Overall, DO admission figures are stable with a total year 1 2024/25 student registration of 316 compared to an admission of 338 in 2023/24 (see Table 3).
21. The 2024/25 Year 1 dispensing optics cohort sizes by provider is provided in Chart 2 below.

Chart 2 – Year 1 dispensing optics cohort by provider in 2024/25



⁸ The admissions ratio for optometry of 17.9% (mean) or 17% (median) does not infer the overall volume of individual applicants who were unable to secure a place as each may have applied for more than one optical qualification and we do not hold this information. Dispensing optics information is not available given the disparate size of providers and that the dominant provider is not routed via UCAS.

Table 3 – Dispensing optics cohort and admissions

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Total DO students	783	960	1,139
Year 1 admissions	346	338	316*

* Registration data substitutes admissions data which will be supplied to the GOC later in 2025.

Average UCAS points offer

22. UCAS tariff points provide a common metric of standardising applicants with different qualifications (for example, 'A' Levels, 'AS' Levels, 'BTEC's etc). In general, UCAS points can indicate the competitiveness of qualifications in attracting high tariff (or quality) students.
23. The median academic offer made by OP qualifications to prospective students was 136.0 UCAS tariff points which approximately equates to AAB grades at A-Level in England (same as the past two years).
24. For dispensing optics in 2023/24, most student admissions are not routed via UCAS applications, so this information is unavailable. However, for providers teaching dispensing optics qualifications, the following admissions information is publicly available⁹:

Provider	UCAS Points (or if none stated, an alternative such as GCSEs)
Anglia Ruskin University BSc (Hons) Dispensing Optician Registerable Award	5 GCSEs (C+) inc. Mathematics, English and Science
Bradford College - BSc (Hons) Ophthalmic Dispensing	64 points or 5 GCSEs (C+) inc. Mathematics, English and Science
Bradford College – Diploma in Ophthalmic Dispensing	5 GCSEs (C+) inc. Mathematics, English and Science/ 1 "A" level (C+) or equivalent
University of Lancashire – BSc Ophthalmic Dispensing	5 GCSEs inc. Maths, Science and English

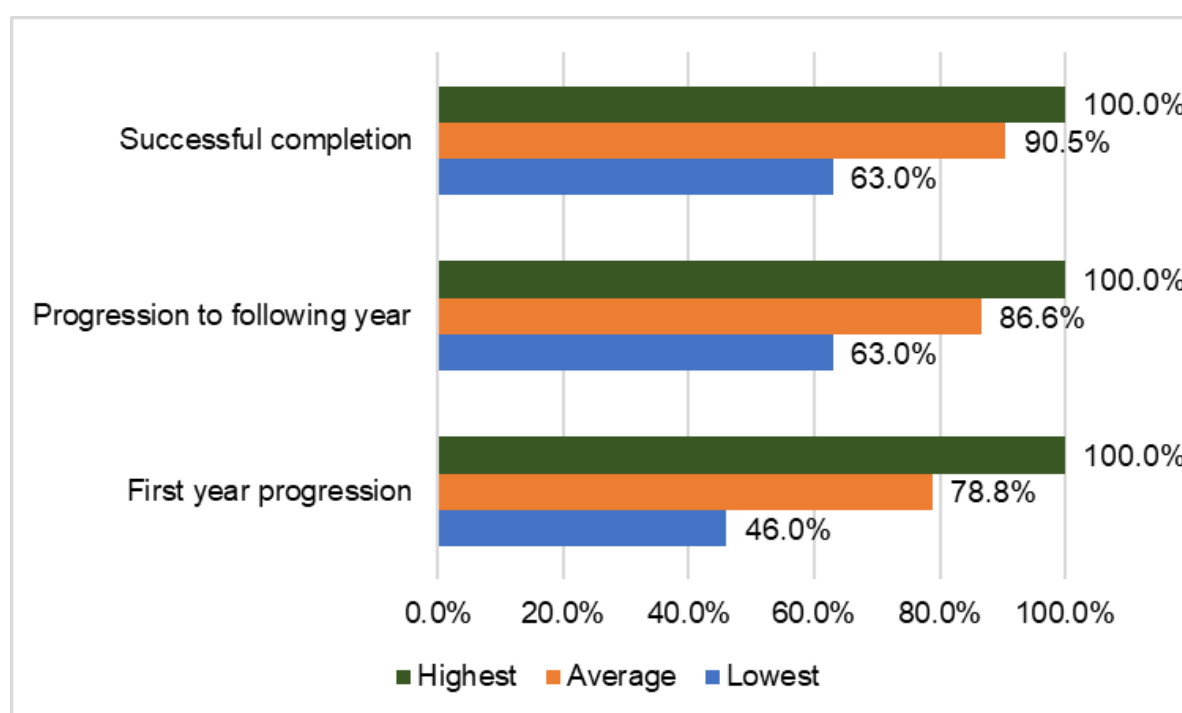
⁹ Information accurate as of July 2025

Progression and attrition

Progression rates

25. Progression rates reflect how well students are developing in their journey to becoming a fully qualified GOC registrant. The data below provides an overview of the data we collect from education and training providers for optometry and dispensing optics. For optometry, an average of 78.8% (81.7% in 2022/23; 84.5% in 2021/22) students progressed to the second year, an average of 86.6% (84.8% in 2022/23; 84.1% in 2021/22) progressed to the following year of the qualification, and an average of 90.5% (90.2% in 2022/23; 91.5% in 2021/22) of final year students successfully completed the qualification.

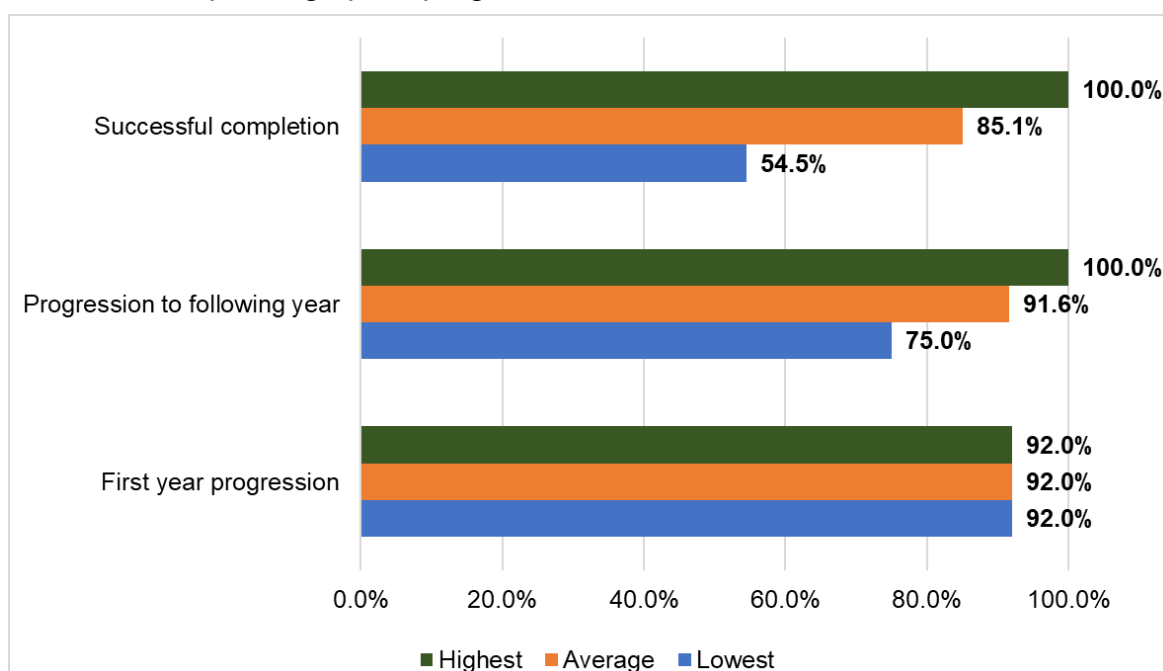
Chart 3 – Optometry progression



Standard deviation:
First year progression $\sigma = 14.1\%$
Progression to following year $\sigma = 9.1\%$
Successful completion $\sigma = 9.5\%$

26. Meanwhile, for dispensing optics, 92% of students with the largest DO provider progressed to a second year, and an average of 85.1% (83.2% in 2022/23; 93.9% in 2021/22) final year students completed the course.

Chart 4 – Dispensing optics progression



Note: First year progression data relates to the ETR cohort where data reflects the largest provider.

Standard deviation:
 First year progression $\sigma = 0\%$
 Progression to following year $\sigma = 8.7\%$
 Successful completion $\sigma = 15.4\%$

Attrition

27. The overall percentage of OP students not completing a qualification within a single cohort (i.e. leaving in between the start and end of the expected qualification duration or retaking final year assessment(s)) was 24.5%¹⁰ (21.8% in 2022/23). The percentage figure for dispensing optics is not comparable due to differences in the qualification structure with some students still waiting to complete outstanding assessments outside of the reporting period.
28. The average rate of students exiting a qualification for year one amounted to 6.3% of optometry students and for dispensing optics students the rate was 4.5% for the largest provider.¹¹

¹⁰ These percentage figures take account of the percentage share of students for each provider to arrive at a total weighted percentage.

¹¹ In later cohort years the average rate for the largest DO provider dropped slightly; year 2 is 4% and year 3 is 3% whilst the average percentage rate for optometry is 4.4% and 1.4% respectively. It is important to note that for optometry these are average sector rates with variance across the sector for each year.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

29. Providers were asked to submit EDI data, and widening participation information used to inform the development of access and participation plans and initiatives in operation.
30. As noted in the previous year's report, the Professional Standards Authority has strengthened its Standards of Good Regulation relating to EDI – the criteria it uses to assess performance of the healthcare regulators. The evidence matrix developed to support its strengthened Standard 3 sets the following expectations:
 - requires education and training providers to demonstrate that they prepare students to provide appropriate care to all patients and service users;
 - requires education and training providers to demonstrate that they take appropriate account of diverse student needs;
 - demonstrates progress made by itself and education and training providers to equip students and registrants to provide appropriate care to all patients and service users;
 - engages with providers of approved qualifications and other organisations in the sector to improve the diversity of student admissions and progression; and
 - has made progress in developing and implementing its plans to reduce any identified unfair differential attainment in training.
31. For this reporting year (2023/24) we asked providers to supply enhanced EDI information for admissions, progression and attainment relating to sex, age group, ethnicity, and disability. Overall, the data suggests there is no evidence of differential attainment, although we are conscious that overall data could be masking differences at individual providers. Further, not all providers were able to provide the full data requested. As this is the first time we requested this data, we will refine our approach in discussion with providers ahead of issuing AMR returns for next year. Nevertheless, we can present some of this information now and appropriate caveats have been placed beside the relevant charts.
32. Further information on the demographic profile of student registrants is available in GOC's annual EDI monitoring report.
33. On average, like previous years, most OP students were Asian, female, and aged 20 and under. Most DO students were White, female, and aged 20 to 39. Longer-term trends suggest that over the past four years, for both OP and DO qualifications, there has been a gradual increase in the percentage¹² of female students and students with a known disability.

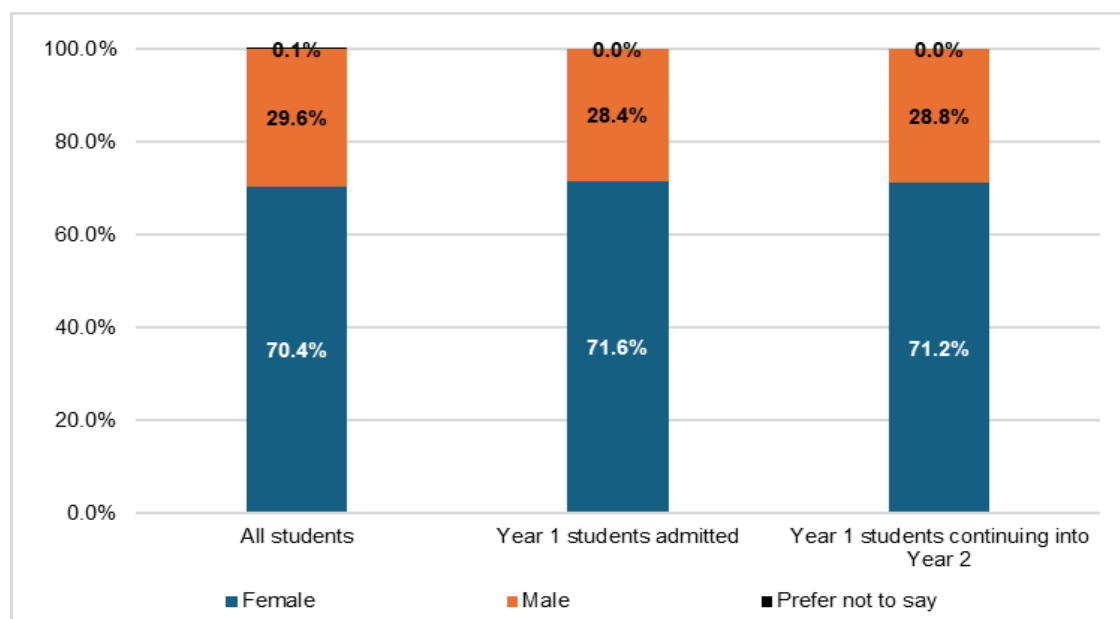
¹² Average (mean) figures across providers are used.

Optometry

Sex

34. Like previous years, over seven in ten OP students are female. Over the last three years the proportion of female OP students across the cohort has increased by 6.4 percentage points. There is no significant difference in the proportion of Year 1 students continuing into Year 2 by sex.

Chart 5 – Admissions and progression* by sex (OP)

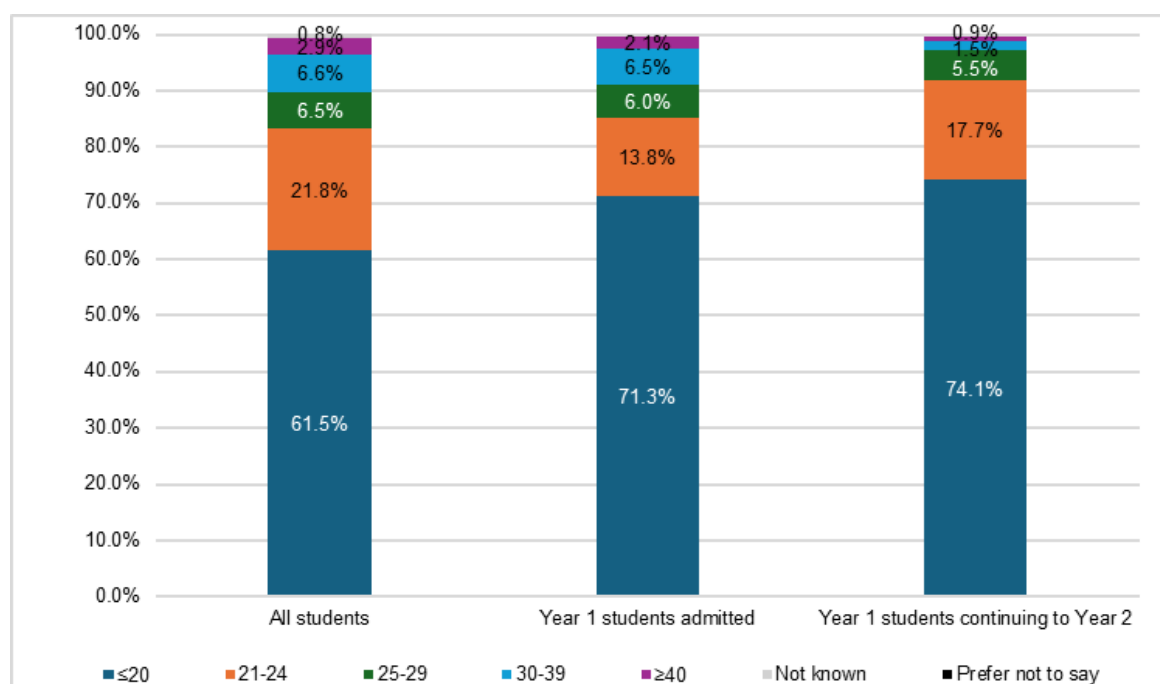


*Note: "Year 1 students continuing to Year 2" data provided by optometry providers using the same calculation method (approximately 53% of optometry providers). Unless stated otherwise, all charts below feature average (mean) data.

Age

35. On average 61.5% of OP students are aged 20 or under, and 83.3% are 24 or under. Over the last three years the proportion of OP students aged 20 and under has increased by 4.5 percentage points. A couple of providers provided their age ranges in different groups – their data have been excluded.

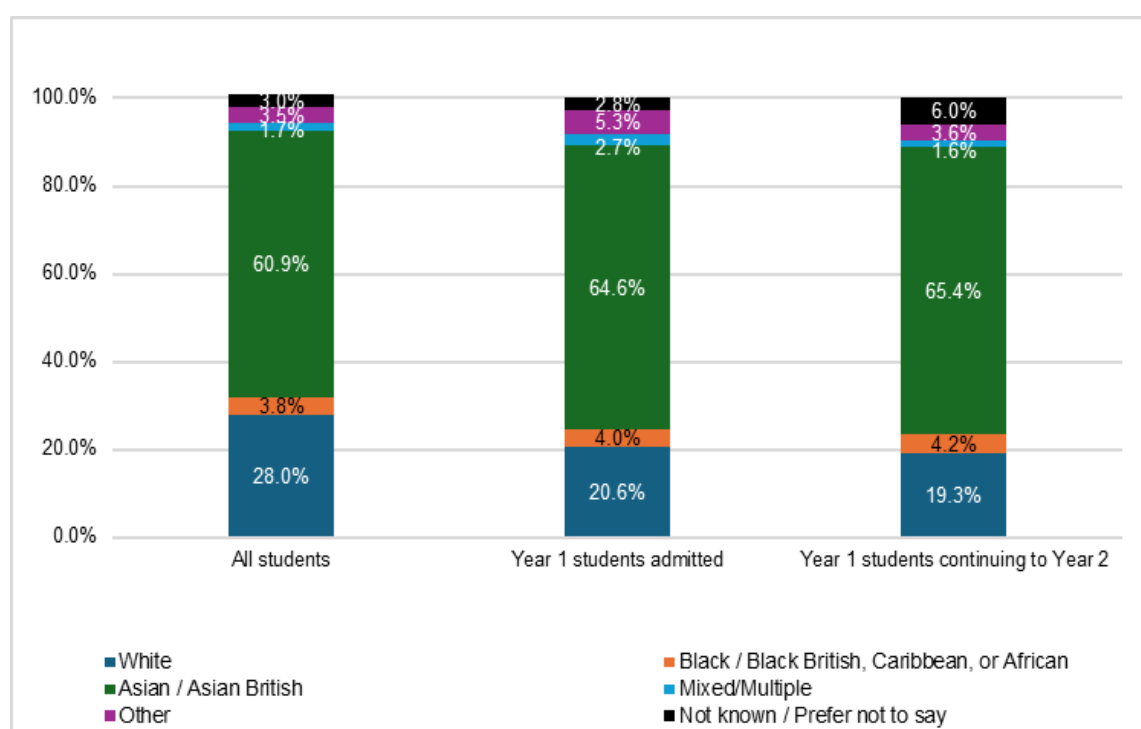
Chart 6 – Admissions and progression by age (OP)



Ethnicity

36. Ethnicity data for total student cohort is similar to previous years. Admissions data suggests that Year 1 students are more ethnically diverse than last year. There is no significant difference in the proportion of Asian or White Year 1 students continuing into Year 2. Student numbers are too small to allow meaningful statistical analysis for other ethnicity categories.

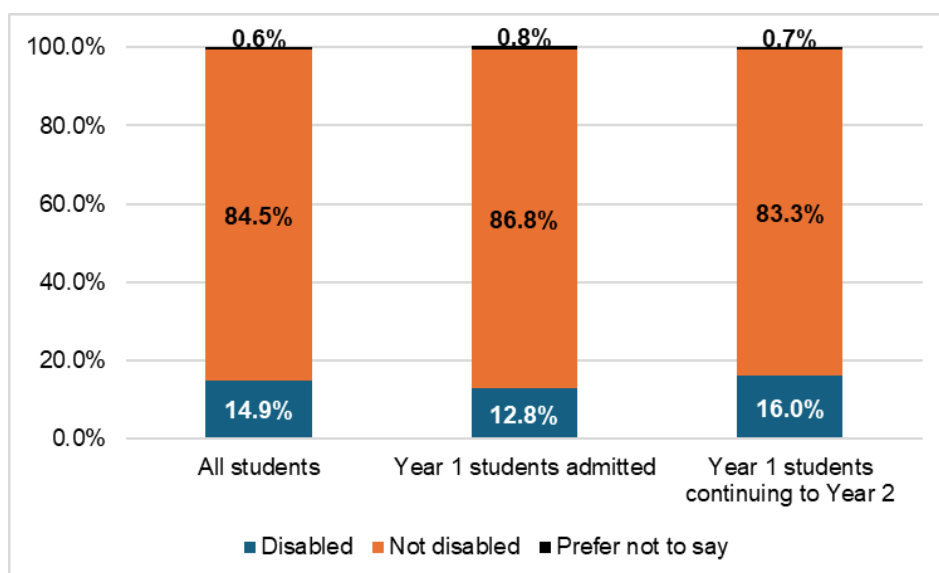
Chart 7 – Admissions and progression by ethnicity (OP)



Disability

37. The proportion of students declaring a disability has increased year-on-year from 6% in 2020/21 to 14.9% in 2023/24. Although caution is needed due to small sample size, the data suggests a higher progression rate from Year 1 to Year 2 in 2023/24 for optometry students with a declared disability.

Chart 8 – Admissions and progression by disability status (OP)



38. The data below relates to the largest ETR provider accounting for 90 per cent of students in the Year 1 2023/24 cohort. Overall, because of much smaller cohort sizes, the EDI data from other providers is patchy and, in many areas, unavailable.

Chart 9 – Admissions and progression by sex (DO)

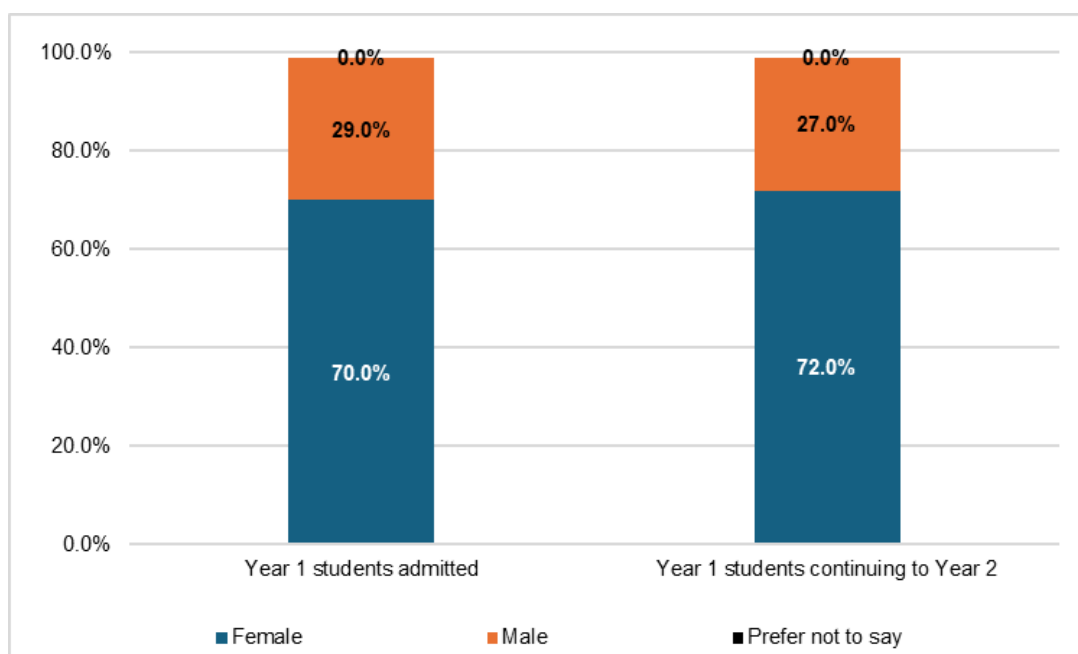


Chart 10 – Admissions and progression by age (DO)

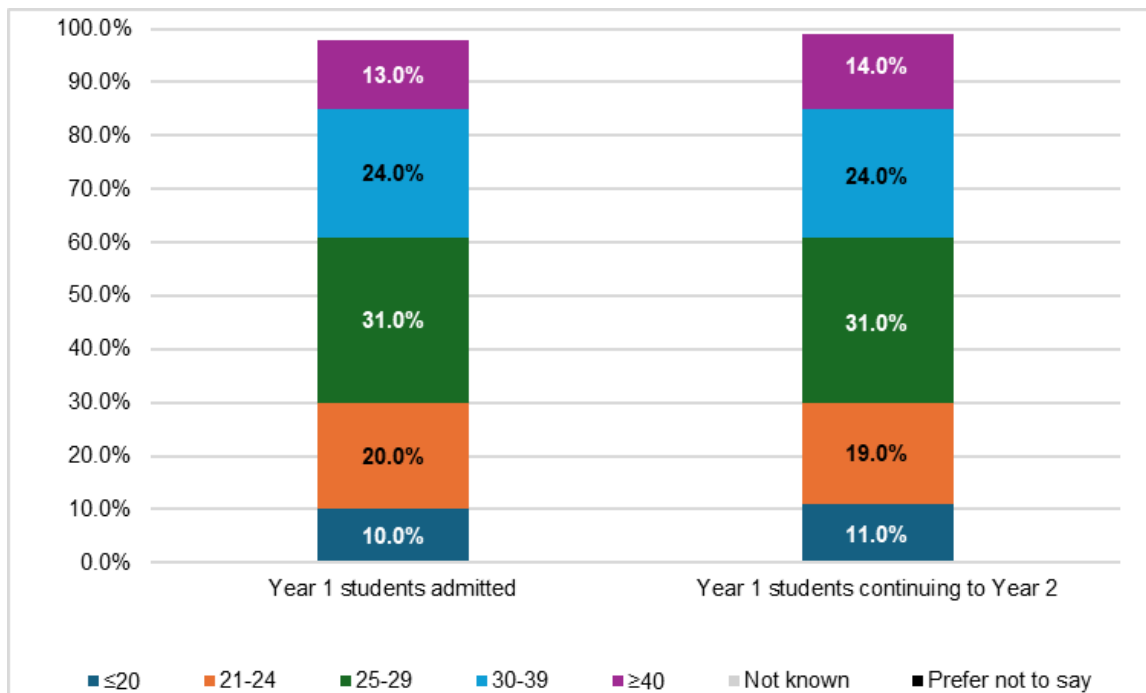
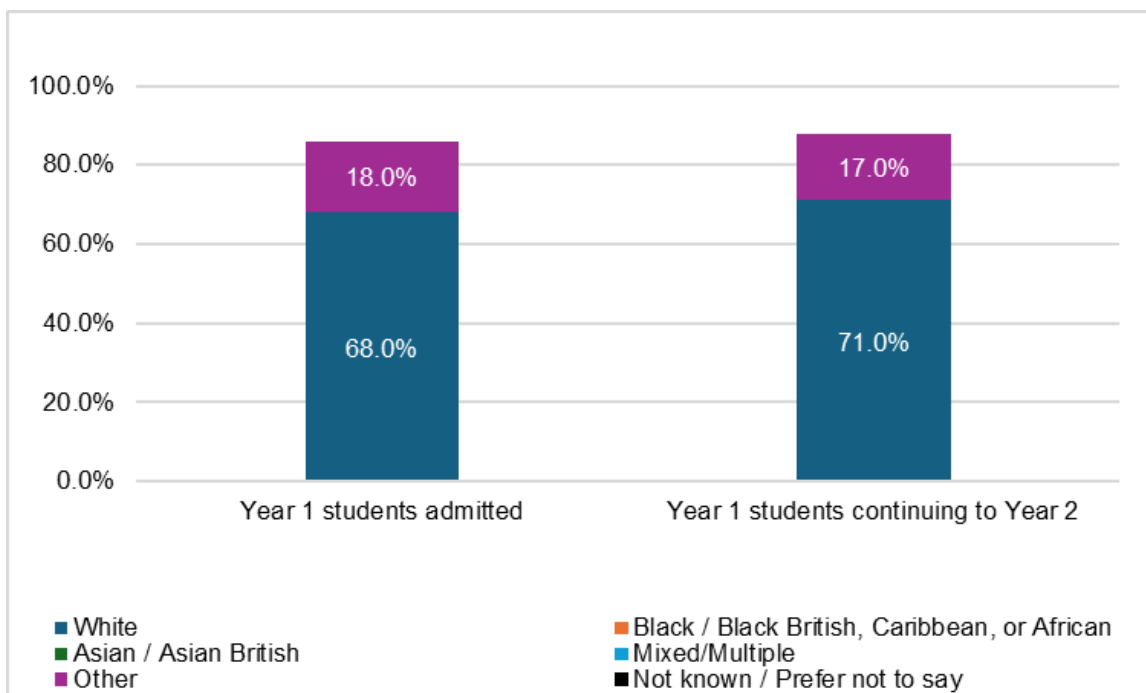
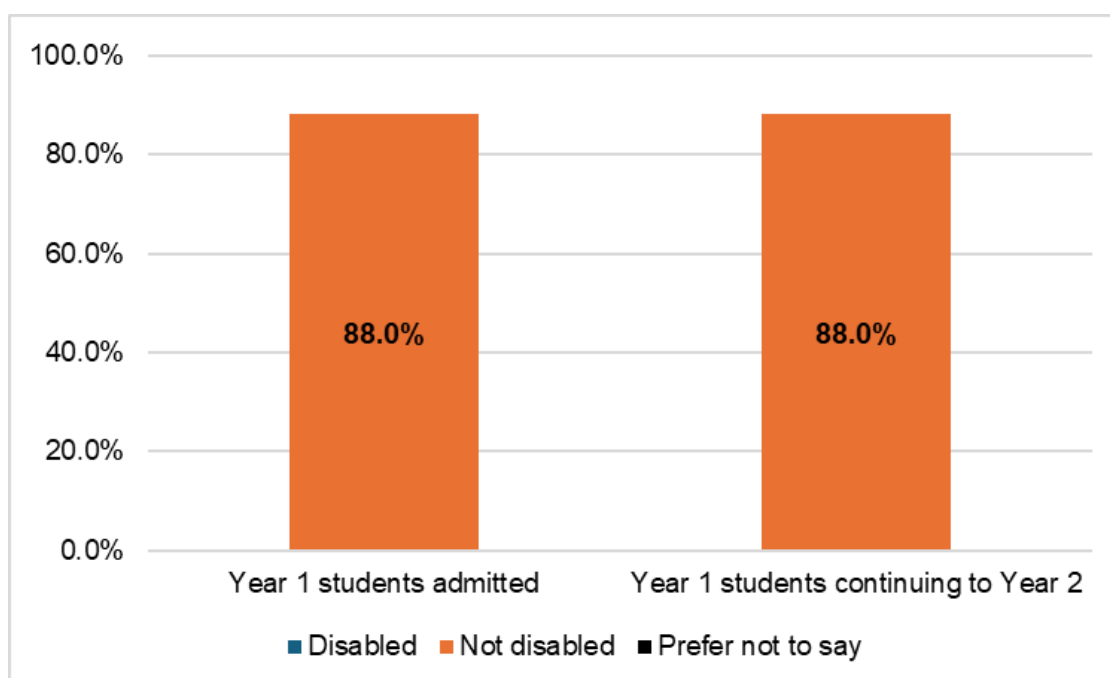


Chart 11 – Admissions and progression by ethnicity (DO)



*The provider suppressed data for categories other than White and Asian/Asian British to mitigate the risk of student identification in line with HESA requirements.

Chart 12 – Admissions and progression by disability status (DO)



Widening Participation

39. Many providers collect widening participation (WP) information which may include a student's declared disability, ethnicity, gender, age group, academic and socio-economic background, religion, sexual orientation, first generation university student (or not), and refugee status.
40. On the whole WP information sourced from HESA is made available to faculty, school and programme teams and is used to inform the development and enhancement of access and participation plans, and to inform policies relating to student support and wellbeing which may include supporting students who declare having a disability, promoting an inclusive learning environment and continuously improving WP activities.
41. Specific examples of WP activities include: strategies and initiatives¹³ to address and analyse identified recruitment and attainment gaps in the EDI data (which may form part of an access and participation plan), bursary schemes and loans to assist students who need support, adjustments for students with disabilities via individual student support plans, support to students for whom English is not their first language, assessments for learning difficulties, support for disadvantaged students including the provision of laptop computers and financial support with food and transportation, unconscious bias training for staff, course

¹³ Examples of such initiatives include a BAME strategic plan focussed on reducing a gap in attainment; the close monitoring of attrition rates, progression and attainment; making offers to applicants in areas of low participation in higher education; and encouraging carers, mature individuals, and those living in deprived areas to make applications.

material available in an accessible format for all students, the avoidance of bunching of deadlines and accessible buildings.

42. Reasonable adjustments used by providers for specific individuals include time extensions to coursework, additional time in examinations, extensions to library loans, supervised rest breaks, separate rooms for examinations to avoid distractions, access to a computer in examinations, advance supply of lecture materials in alternative formats, adjustment to timetables to support students with caring responsibilities and allowing students to attend religious events, adjustable tables and chairs, and individual support during teaching sessions.
43. Sector discussions have taken place concerning how all students, regardless of their background can progress towards meeting the outcomes for registration without compromising patient safety. A recently published [SPOKE report](#) considers the relationships between 'fitness to train', reasonable adjustments and suspension of studies (in education settings) and the equivalent processes in employment settings. The report considers the importance of supporting those with disabilities and championing diversity whilst considering where the borderlines lie regarding patient safety. The report summarises the themes identified during SPOKE network discussions which include: robust systems and entry requirements, mental health and undeclared issues, assessing new and chronic health conditions, fitness to practise timelines, confidentiality and data protection, academic misconduct, reasonable adjustments, and assessment of communication outcomes.

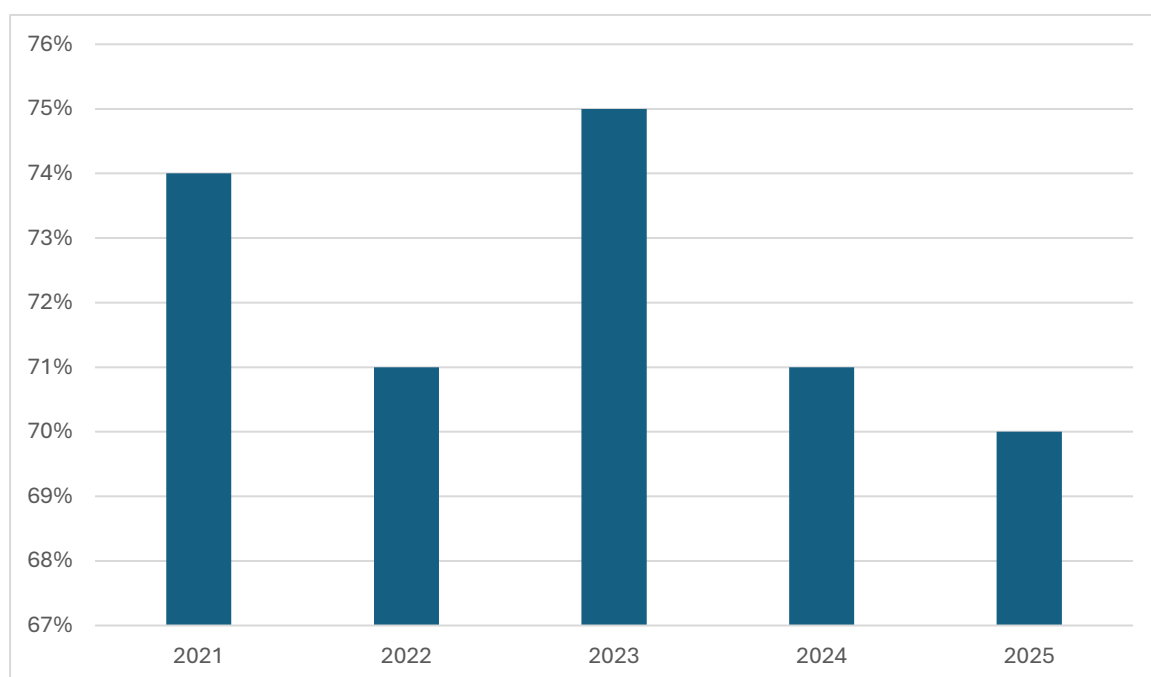
Outcome 2: Qualifications equip registrants to deliver safe and effective eye care for all

44. Providers of approved optometry and dispensing optics qualifications are adapting to meet the new requirements whilst teaching-out the old handbook qualifications and there is still some way to go before the first ETR cohorts graduate from entry-level qualifications. The ongoing transition is a key reason for GOC's decision to extend the Knowledge Hub to support qualification providers to successfully implement the ETR. The Hub will continue to be operated by the Sector Partnership for Optical Education (SPOKE) until July 2028.
45. Moreover, a longitudinal research impact study is planned to measure the effectiveness of the new outcomes and standards for GOC approved qualifications on registrants' competence, confidence and capability (measuring the change we want to see). The impact study is expected to commence in 2026 and will provide valuable input to this report with annual data concerning newly qualified registrants who:
 - feel prepared for safe clinical practice,
 - feel confident within their scope of practice, and
 - perceive gaps in their knowledge, skills and behaviours.

Registrant confidence in education system

46. Overall, 70% of respondents to the 2025 GOC Registrant Workforce and Perceptions Survey consider the GOC ensures the quality of optical education, a fall of 1% on the previous year and the lowest it has been during the last five years. In the 2025 wave, confidence was higher among students than fully qualified professionals with similar figures for dispensing opticians (67%) and optometrists (65%).

Chart 13 – Registrant confidence in education system



Attainment rate

Optometry

47. To measure attainment, we consider the percentage of degree classifications which are a 2:2 or above (required by the GOC) and fails.
48. Student attainment on this measure is high. Across the providers, an average of 98.9% of optometry students who completed their qualification obtained a 2:2 or higher (99.4% in 2022/23; 95.8% in 2021/22).
49. Across the providers, an average of 0.4% (0.2% in 2022/23; 2.9% in 2021/22) of students failed the qualification. The range of first-class degrees, looking at all providers, is from zero to 33.3% (10.6% to 63.0% in 2022/23; 3.0% to 69.0% in 2021/22).
50. The pass rate for the College of Optometrists' Scheme for Registration (stage two) was 93.6% for the 2023/24.

Table 4 – Attainment (OP)

Metric	Lowest	Average	Highest
Degree – First	0.0%	18.2%	33.3%
Degree – 2:2 or higher	95.0%	98.9%	100.0%

Standard deviation:
Degree - First σ = 8.0%
Degree – 2:2 or higher σ = 1.5%

Optometry EDI attainment data

51. Given the very high rate of optometry students achieving a 2:2 or above and sample size considerations, it is not possible to identify differences in attainment by protected characteristics. We are considering our future approach to obtaining attainment data.

Dispensing optics

52. Analysis of student attainment is difficult for DO qualifications because not all awards are classified in the same way (some use 'pass', 'merit', and 'distinction' grades), some are not classified at all, and some do not follow the traditional academic year structure and are therefore not comparable with optometry. For those qualifications awarding degrees, an average of 91.9% (93.3% in 2022/23; 94.1% in 2021/22) of students obtained either a 2:2 or higher (for honours degrees), or a pass or higher (for non-honours qualifications).

Table 5 – Attainment (DO)

Metric	Lowest	Average	Highest
Degree – First	0.0%	11.4%	16.7%
Degree – 2:2 or higher	50.0%	91.9%	100.0%
Degree – Distinction	22.2%	44.2%	54.5%
Degree – Pass, Merit, or Distinction	88.8%	96.3%	100.0%

Standard deviation data not provided due to range of attainment classifications

53. For dispensing optics EDI attainment data, the picture is too fragmented to present information for graduating cohorts on non-ETR qualifications. This was the final year that some DO providers submitted returns since they have become ABDO centres.
54. Data from the dispensing optics awarding body focuses on initial attempts of the final assessment for the handbook qualification, rather than the ETR. The pass rate for the reporting year is 25%, with final completion taking place on an individual basis.

Placements and supervision

55. On placements, much progress has been achieved with the development of Clinical Learning in Practice (CLiP) placements as well as other placement schemes operating in Manchester and in Scotland, and work continues across the sector to facilitate placements in sufficient numbers. In the GOC's 2025 business registrant survey a quarter of respondents had arrangements with universities or the College of Optometrists to offer placements with this being more common amongst multiples (44%) than independent practices (11%). The primary perceived benefits to offering placements are future facing, through supporting a new generation of optical professionals and increasing the pipeline of future employees,

rather than immediate benefits to the workforce at the time of placement.¹⁴

56. In GOC's 2025 registrant survey, 20% of working optometrist respondents had worked as a supervisor for pre-registration trainee optometrists in the last 12 months, a fall of 3% on the previous year. Working as a supervisor was more common amongst those who worked for a multiple (29%) compared with independents (9%), both seeing falls of 4% and 3% respectively, on the previous year. There was variation between nations ranging from 16% in Northern Ireland to 30% in Wales. In 2024, respondents who indicated that they sometimes or frequently feel unable to cope with their workload were more likely to work as supervisors. The negative impact has been found again in this year's survey, suggesting that the supervising role may make it harder for optometrists to manage their workload alongside additional responsibilities. The survey found that 21% of supervisors for pre-registration trainee optometrists sometimes or frequently felt unable to cope with workload whilst 15% never felt unable to cope with workload.¹⁵

Table 6 – Working as a supervisor

Metric	2024	2025
Percentage of working optometrists who worked as a pre-registration supervisor in last 12mths	23%	20%

57. Whilst there remains significant concern in the sector about availability and funding of placements, CLiP and other placement schemes have helped to mitigate these.

Graduate outcomes

58. Data from the HESA Graduate Outcomes Survey with its focus on 15 months after graduating suggests that on average earnings from qualifications relating to optometry qualifications was £24,600, 94% were either in work or study, and 90% were using what they learnt during their studies in their current work. This suggests a very high employment rate. There was insufficient data relating to dispensing optics qualifications.
59. There are some weighty caveats to the survey however, optometry qualifications data is sometimes sourced from broader subject categories including ophthalmics (55%), allied health graduates (36%) and subjects allied to medicine (9%). Data was gathered in 2021-22.¹⁶

¹⁴ Business Registrant Survey 2025, Impact for the GOC, p24, April 2025. Note: The findings are based on completes from 192 registered businesses, representing 7% of the overall registered business population

¹⁵ [Registrant Workforce and Perceptions Survey 2025](#), Enventure Research for the GOC, p27, June 2025

¹⁶ See [HESA: About our data](#)

Outcome 3: High levels of student satisfaction and welfare

60. Student feedback from GOC quality assurance activities suggests that overall, students consider their programme teams are approachable, accommodating, and supportive. This is an area that has stood out for several providers. It appears evident that most students consider they have sufficient opportunities to provide feedback on their qualifications. However, there are more mixed opinions on the processes in place for actioning student feedback. There have also been mixed views across the student body on timeliness and usefulness of assessment feedback, as well as preparation for assessments. However, in every area, there are providers who have received extremely positive feedback.
61. Across the sector, the quality of teaching is an area that received extremely positive feedback from students, as well as the facilities and resources available e.g. clinic space, library support, virtual learning environments, ability to contact the programme team. Where any issues with facilities and resources have emerged, they are said to be resolved quickly. Some students have reported a lack of clarity surrounding the route to registration for their chosen discipline, although the GOC recognises the work carried out by providers during induction periods and welcome weeks to ensure information and support is provided.
62. National Student Survey (NSS) scores for OP qualifications were higher than the 'subjects allied to medicine' (SATM) for all categories except Learning Resources. Scores were within 5% of the national average for all categories except being lower for Assessment Feedback, Student Voice, and Student Union. Scores in all categories were higher than last year.
63. Like past years, few providers reported NSS scores for DO qualifications, but those that did were, like the past year, higher than the SATM for all categories. Scores were within 5% of the national average for all categories except being higher for Assessment Feedback, Student Voice, and Student Union. Scores in all categories except Academic Support were higher than last year.
64. With regard to supervision, 83.4% of ophthalmics students said they had received appropriate supervision on their placement, an increase of 1.8% on the previous year.¹⁷
65. In the GOC's 2025 registrant survey, 8% of student respondents had experienced harassment, abuse, or bullying from tutors, lecturers or supervisors in the last 12 months (no change from 2024). For 27% of student optometrists and 38% of student dispensing opticians the last incident was reported (either by themselves or a colleague), which for optometry is slightly lower than fully qualified registrants, and slightly higher for dispensing optics. Reasons given for non-reporting included not being able to prove that the incident or behaviour took place (41% for

¹⁷ NSS data, July 2025

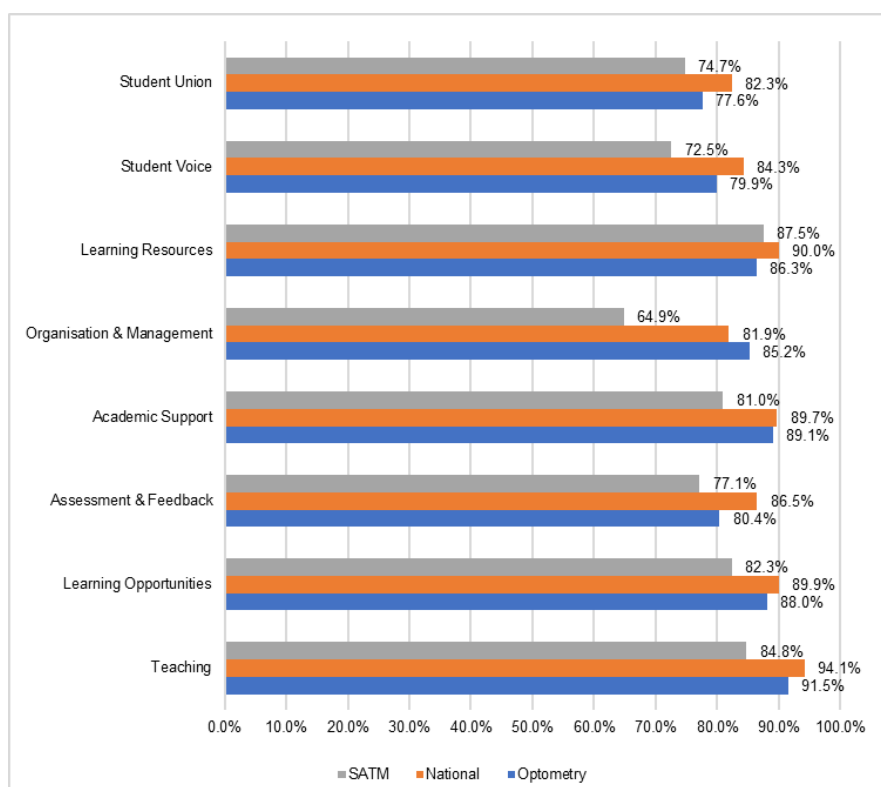
student optometrists, 36% for student dispensing opticians), worry they would not be taken seriously (41% and 36%), and not trusting anything will be done or the people I have to report to (33% and 36%).

66. 6% of student optometrists had experienced discrimination from tutors, lecturers or supervisors in the last 12 months (no change from 2024). No student dispensing opticians who responded reported discrimination.
67. 36% of optometry students reported taking a leave of absence due to stress in the last 12 months compared to 23% for all survey respondents (unchanged since 2024). The figure for student dispensing opticians was 25%, an increase of 5 percentage points since the 2024 survey.¹⁸

Optometry

68. By category¹⁹, the averages for student satisfaction by category are illustrated in the chart below. The average optometry NSS scores are between 72% and 96% for all categories.

Chart 14 – NSS category scores (OP)



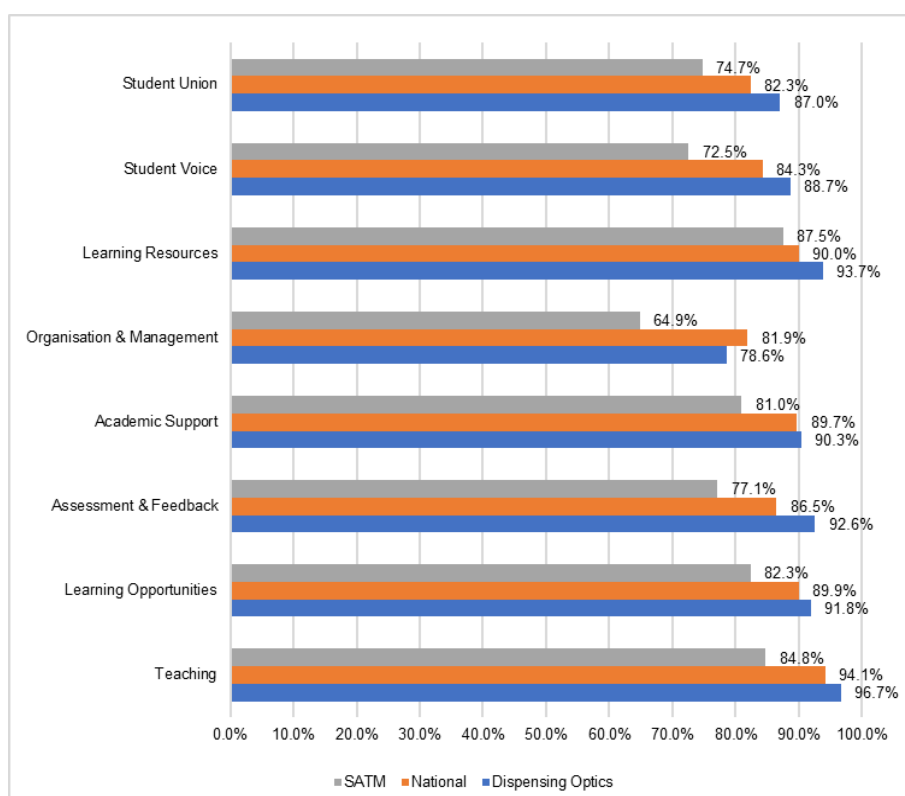
¹⁸ GOC Workforce and Perceptions Survey 2025

¹⁹ The figures refer to the proportion (%) of students expressing satisfaction in each category of their university experience. An explanation of the category groupings is provided at Appendix 3.

Dispensing optics

69. Participation in the NSS was limited, as per usual, for reasons including qualification ineligibility. However, qualifications that did participate performed well.
70. By category²⁰, the average score for DO qualifications in the NSS is above the national average for 7 of the 8 categories and above the average for SATM for all categories. The averages by category are illustrated in the chart below.

Chart 15 – NSS category scores (DO)



²⁰ The figures refer to the proportion (%) of students expressing satisfaction in each category of their university experience. An explanation of the category groupings is provided at Annex 3.

Outcome 4: A strong, innovative and resilient sector

Number of GOC approved qualifications

71. The number of qualifications across the GOC's regulated professions remained stable this year. We expect to see some change in the provider landscape as dispensing optics providers teaching out handbook qualifications become ABDO teaching centres, with the potential for new qualifications in both dispensing optics and optometry.

Table 7 – Number of qualifications

Qualification type	Number of providers	Number of qualifications under handbook	Number of qualifications under ETR*
Optometry (OP)	16	22	15**
Independent prescribing (IP)	7	7	5***
Dispensing optics (DO)	7	12	5
Contact lens optician (CLO)	4	4	1

*Includes providers with full GOC approval already adapted to the ETR or at stage 4 of the staged application process who have been granted GOC approval to recruit to the qualification.

**Includes two quals combined Optom with IP

*** Standalone IP qualifications only, not including combined Optom with IP

Quality Assurance and Enhancement activities

72. Whilst we are in a period of transition moving from one set of requirements (the education handbooks) to another (the ETR), there are currently two sets of regulatory requirements in operation whilst handbook-only qualifications are taught out. The GOCs quality assurance activities consisting of visits to providers, processing adaptations for existing qualifications moving from the handbooks to the ETR as well as new ETR applications, and setting conditions for programmes relating to specific circumstances etc, have all continued throughout this period.
73. In terms of identifying potential concerns, our quality assurance monitoring helps us to identify whether there are any repeated areas of concerns for particular qualifications. For example, if on every quality assurance visit, we identify that a qualification is consistently not meeting a particular requirement we are able to set conditions to continue to monitor and then trigger further quality assurance, like a risk-based review, if required. Under our new quality assurance and enhancement methodology (QAEM) we will be able to monitor areas of repeated

concern and non-assurance both within qualifications and across the sector.

74. As a summary of activity:

- 10 visits to providers of GOC approved qualifications took place in the 2023/24 academic year under the old handbooks.
- Across providers, a cumulative total of 655 out of 674 requirements reviewed on quality assurance visits were deemed as met (97%).
- 11 ETR adaptations (i.e. an adapting from the handbook to ETR requirements) were completed in 2023/24.
- Across providers, a cumulative total of 197 out of 218 of the Standards for Approved Qualifications reviewed for ETR qualifications were deemed as met (90%).
- 47 conditions were set across quality assurance visits, adaptations and applications. For QA visits alone, 20 conditions were set, and no serious concerns were issued or conducted.²¹

Financial Sustainability

75. The funding of higher education is a devolved matter, and different funding methods exist in each nation of the UK. As reported last year, the sufficiency and sustainability of funding for optical education delivered by regulated Higher Education Institutions (HEI) is a key risk for the sector. Whilst in June 2024 the Institute of Fiscal Studies had estimated that real terms per-student funding had fallen by 18% since 2012/13²², in England, the maximum tuition fee increased slightly by 3.1% for the 2025/26 academic year to £9,535²³. In England, both optometry and dispensing optics, along with other high-cost humanity and science-based subjects, are in Office for Students (OfS) price band B which attracts an additional high-cost subject funding allocation of about £1,117 per student, per year, amounting to a 24.8% increase on the previous year's rate of £895.²⁴ Different arrangements exist in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

76. In England, in May 2025, the OfS published its annual financial sustainability report for the education sector which showed that the financial performance of universities and colleges is forecast to decline in 2024/25 for the third consecutive year. The OfS notes that universities had predicted a strengthened financial performance largely expected to come from international students' tuition fees, which the OfS regarded as "overly ambitious" and that the recovery could be slower or even reversed.²⁵ In 2024, the OfS held a consultation seeking views about how it could develop its funding approach, to which [we responded](#).

²¹ GOC Education Operations, 12 June 2025

²² [Higher education finances: how they have fared, and what options will an incoming government have?](#), Institute for Fiscal Studies (ifs.org.uk)

²³ [Tuition fee rise: What does it mean?](#), Universities UK, 14 November 2024

²⁴ [Funding for the academic year 2024-25 OFS decisions](#), OFS, 29 July 2024, p12.

²⁵ [Financial sustainability of higher education providers in England](#), OFS, 8 May 2025, p3-4.

77. Meanwhile, the Secretary of State for Education Bridget Phillipson MP, announced in May 2025 that funding will be refocussed away from Level 7 (masters-level) apprenticeships from January 2026, while maintaining support for those aged 16-21 and existing apprentices with the aim of rebalancing funding towards training at lower levels.²⁶ Meanwhile, the Secretary of State also wrote to the OfS setting out funding priorities. This guidance includes ensuring that high-cost funding can be more effectively targeted towards priority provision which supports future skills needs and the Industrial Strategy. OfS must maintain the per-student funding rates in line with last year, unless not possible due to fluctuation in student numbers, for High-Cost subject funding for all price groups and for nursing, midwifery and allied health supplement.²⁷
78. At the time of writing the announcement of General Ophthalmic Services (GOS) fees in England for 2025-26 has been delayed with the Optometric Fees Negotiating Committee (OFNC) advising that the NHS is only likely to uplift the GOS fee with inflation for the forthcoming year. OFNC said that staffing issues and news that NHS England will be merged into the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has likely contributed to the delay.²⁸ In March 2025, DHSC announced that optical voucher values would remain unchanged in England for 2025/26 which the OFNC described as impacting most on children and vulnerable adults and will lead over time to more NHS repairs and replacements.²⁹
79. In Scotland, the Scottish Government announced a 6% increase in General Ophthalmic Services (GOS) fees for optometrists performing NHS eye exams in Scotland. The increase will be backdated to 1 April 2024.³⁰ The increase is the fourth consecutive uplift since 2021 and has been accepted by Optometry Scotland members.³¹ In addition, shortly before publication of this report, the Scottish Government announced a 4% increase in GOS fees for 2025-26. The increase is aligned with uplifts offered to other primary care professions in Scotland.³²
80. In Wales, optometry services received an uplift of £3.9m for 2024/25. Areas prioritised in the contract negotiations include supporting the workforce to provide specialist eyecare in glaucoma and increasing the number of optometrists with higher qualifications to provide this service. Other highlights include additional funding support for optometrists and dispensing opticians for their continuing professional development and doubling the fee paid to optometry practices to support and train student optometrists, amongst others.³³

²⁶ [Next generation of builders and carers set to rebuild Britain](#), UK Government, 27 May 2025.

²⁷ [Public letter to Sir David Behan \(interim Chair of the OfS\)](#) from Secretary of State for Education, 19 May 2025

²⁸ [Delay expected in announcement of 2025-26 GOS fees](#), Optometry Today, 20 March 2025

²⁹ OFNC Statement: [GOS voucher values in England to be frozen for 2025/26](#), FODO, 27 March 2025

³⁰ [Scottish Government announces proposed 6% GOS fee increase](#), Optometry Today, 26 September 2024

³¹ [Optometry Scotland members accept 6% GOS fee increase](#), Optometry Today, 1 November 2024

³² [Optometry Scotland accepts 4% GOS fee uplift](#), Optometry Today, 28 July 2025

³³ [Written Statement: Optometry Contract Negotiations 2024-25](#), Welsh Government, 14 February 2025

81. In Northern Ireland, the Department of Health (NI) have agreed to increase sight test fees payable to optometrists and ophthalmic medical practitioners to £24.54 from 1 April 2024 (up from £23.15 in 2023) as announced in March 2025, with arrears to be paid³⁴.
82. In the annual monitoring returns (AMR), providers raised various issues including the cost of running qualifications outstripping the fees received, as well as institutional finance decisions affecting all qualifications hosted by that institution. There is concern that the funding climate will put staff:student ratios (SSR) under pressure; in this context, we have asked SPOKE to produce guidance on SSRs.
83. More positively, providers continue to report a range of resourcing and investment decisions which include upgrades to clinical facilities, the installation of new technology in optics, and hospital clinics housed in university buildings providing more placement opportunities. An example of a new state-of-the-art facility is a £7.7m investment for the creation of a new Centre for Eyecare Excellence at the University of Plymouth. The centre due to open in September 2026 will offer more appointments to the public, delivered by students under supervision, alongside specialist clinics.³⁵

Innovation

84. Providers have been developing relationships with stakeholders to support their ETR qualifications. 80% of optometry ETR qualifications have already utilised the method for delivering professional and clinical learning and experience established by the College of Optometrists in partnership with providers and employers (CLiP). Alternatives to the CLiP model by individual providers include the University of Manchester which includes the integration of patient facing experience throughout the duration of the qualification, as well as qualifications in Scotland which are being developed in partnership with NHS Education for Scotland (NES).
85. Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) launched the UK's first integrated optometry and independent prescribing MOptom (IP) qualification. The new Masters' qualification was launched in September 2024 in partnership with NES which will help with the delivery of clinical placements.³⁶ Separately, NES will merge with NHS National Services Scotland to create NHS Delivery, a new cross cutting organisation for NHS Scotland.³⁷

³⁴ [Business Services Organisation \(Northern Ireland\)](#), 26 March 2025

³⁵ [New £7.7 million centre to offer best in eyecare teaching and practice](#), University of Plymouth, January 2025

³⁶ [GCU welcomes Scottish Ministers for launch of new programme](#), Optometry Today, 25 September 2025

³⁷ NHS [National Services for Scotland](#), 17 June 2025

86. Collaborations and joint ventures with employers, hospitals and charities are being established. Placement opportunities are being provided in qualifications across all years with some specialised clinical experience available in areas such as myopia management and glaucoma. Various providers in their AMR returns have spoken about providing a real world or real-life experience for their students. Some providers have reported hospital clinics being housed in their own buildings. An opportunity likely to be enhanced in future with the introduction of apprenticeships is flexible delivery of qualifications allowing students to learn at their own pace as often takes place in independent prescribing. The ETR has provided an opportunity for providers to refresh their qualifications aligning them with the Outcomes for Registration; introducing new content and involving a wide range of stakeholders in this process.
87. A notable innovation has been the attention some providers have given to assist first-year students with their transition to university. Professionalism and lifestyle coaching initiatives have been raised in the AMR with similar aims to support rates of continuation, reduce attainment gaps and enhance progression. It is a positive development that supports widening participation, and we hope other providers will consider similar initiatives or highlight any existing activities in next year's returns.
88. Other examples of innovation or good practice submitted, include:
- Providing students with a range of career options beyond traditional routes through exposure to diverse experience in clinical settings, patient groups, and research
 - Integrating multi-disciplinary training (MDT) within qualifications using diverse professionals such as independent prescribing optometrists, ophthalmologists, and pharmacists. In addition, integrating student optometrists into the wider health network working alongside other health professionals
 - Use of virtual learning environments (VLEs) to enhance the learning experience for students
 - Regular review of syllabi involving stakeholders to ensure qualifications continue to meet sector needs
 - Adaption of software used to monitor attainment of competencies under the old handbooks to monitor attainment of Outcomes for Registration
 - A greater emphasis on reflection from students allowing them to discuss what they have learned in theory and in practice
 - Student forums to discuss feedback with staff.

Risk

89. All qualifications submitted risk analyses. The time and energy required to implement new ETR qualifications and update materials whilst the old handbook qualifications are being taught out at the same time was raised in some annual monitoring returns, with one provider describing this as a "strain". Meanwhile, as reported last year, workforce shortages is a recurring concern with local competitors seeking to recruit amongst a

limited supply of highly skilled staff. A potential reduction in student applications was also raised as a concern particularly as the existing model of optometric education is evolving with the introduction of apprenticeships.

90. There are still some concerns relating to the supply of placements, nevertheless, providers have been expanding their links with NHS hospitals, specialist community practices, charities, optical businesses, and various providers have been expanding their own in-house clinics thereby enhancing placement provision. Some pandemic issues remain such as significant localised waiting times for IP placements, as well as some dispensing optics students who started the qualification before or during the pandemic encountering difficulties in gaining the required case records needed to complete their qualification.
91. Various potential long-term issues were identified which include artificial intelligence impacting the number of optical staff required, and the enhancement of other health professionals' scope of practice which could reduce the need for some optical staff.

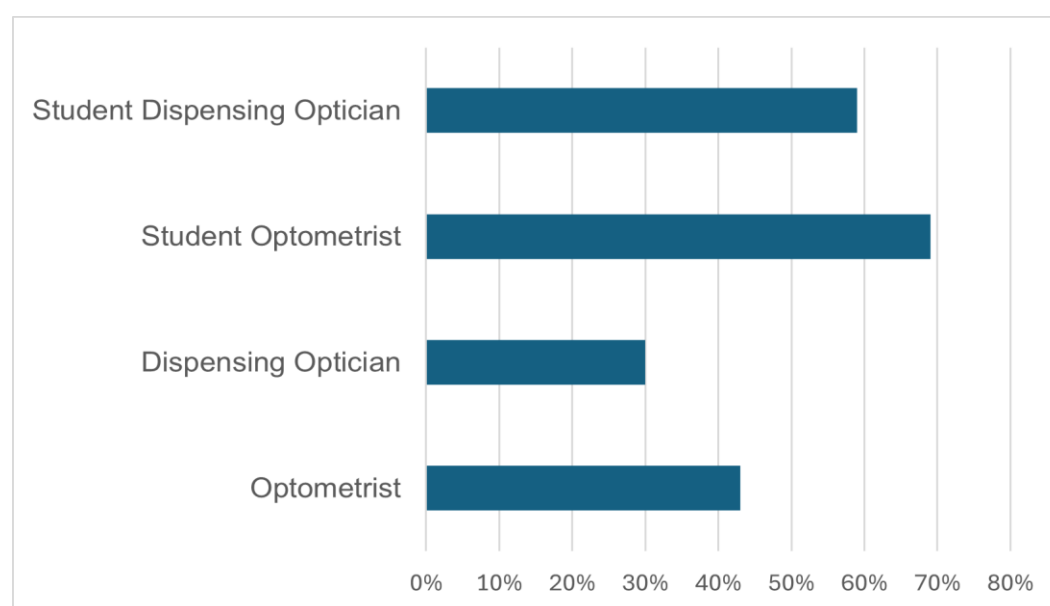
Outcome 5: Post-registration qualifications support registrants to deliver a wide range of eye care services

92. The GOC's post-registration qualifications in independent prescribing and contact lens optics as well as a growing number of specialist qualifications in areas such as low vision and glaucoma are helping to prepare optical professionals to deliver enhanced eye care in community settings with an increasing ageing population, whilst helping to relieve pressure on GPs and hospital eye care services.

Interest in post-registration qualifications

93. Just over a third of respondents (35%) to the GOC's 2025 registrant survey had additional qualifications, including 13% who had a glaucoma qualification and 12% who had a medical retina qualification.
94. 42% of respondents were considering obtaining additional qualifications in the next 12-24 months. In line with previous years, there is significantly greater interest in gaining additional qualifications/skills amongst younger respondents and optical students when compared with older respondents and fully qualified registrants, particularly dispensing opticians. As found in 2024, respondents with additional qualifications were more likely to plan to gain more.
95. The top three additional qualifications of interest were independent prescribing (41%), glaucoma (40%) and medical retina (37%).³⁸ Among dispensing opticians, 18% expressed interest in moving to optometry and 17% in pursuing the contact lens speciality.

Chart 16 – Plans to gain additional qualifications by registration type

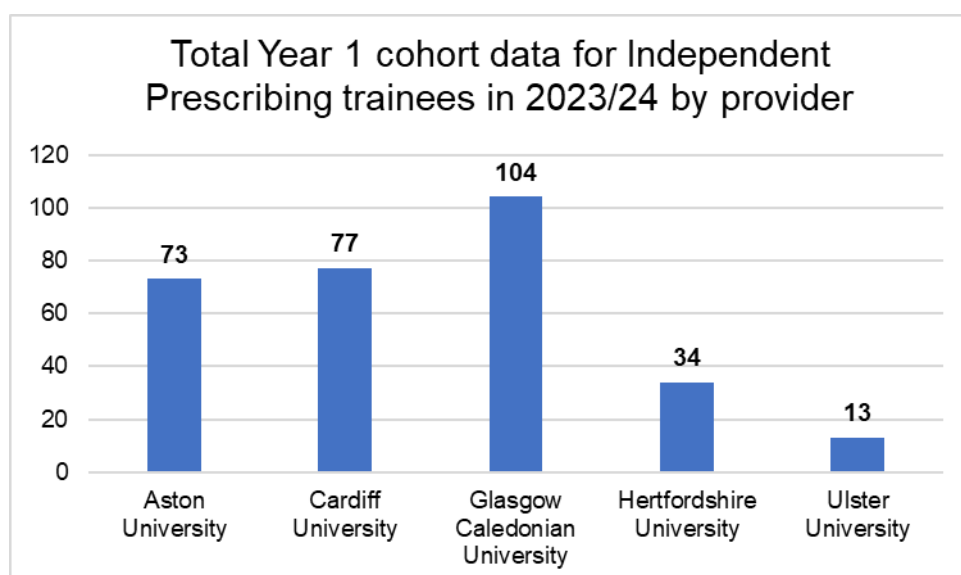


³⁸ Ibid, p21 & 62

Independent prescribing

96. Unless otherwise indicated, the comments here relate to all independent prescribing and therapeutic prescribing (IP) qualifications, excluding the IP approved qualification offered by the College of Optometrists.
97. As of March 2025, 2,066 GOC registrants were registered as independent prescribing optometrists, an increase of 16.2% on the previous year.
98. The number of IP trainees increased substantially from 435 in 2021/22 to 521 in 2022/2023 (+16.5%). However, it has decreased to 415 in 2023/24 (-20.3%) and there also been a fall in application numbers.

Chart 16 – Number of IP trainees by provider



*Cohort data for City, St Georges, University of London is not collected as the programme is run as CPD modules. Please note for Independent prescribing the previous cohort year (2023/24) is provided above as the latest data is incomplete due to multiple intakes throughout the academic year for this qualification.

99. Whilst nearly all education and training providers have adapted to the ETR for entry-level qualifications, four providers are still delivering the handbook IP qualification (see *ETR Adaptations status on page 4*).
100. A report published by SPOKE in January questioned the sustainability of IP qualifications as a result of lower numbers of potential supervisor practitioners, at least compared with contact lens optics, varied geographical services, lack of universality in primary settings, and a dependency on tightly controlled commissioning.
101. Recommendations in the report included increasing the recognition and status of supervision across the sector and mentoring of others as a core expectation for all registrants, as well as modelling the level of demand

for placements for both handbook and ETR prescribing qualifications (among many others).³⁹

Key data – IP qualifications

Table 8 – Number of IP students

Total students	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Total IP students	435	521	415

Table 9 – Admissions and attainment (IP)

Metric	Lowest	Average	Highest
Applicants admitted	71.6%	83.8%	100.0%
Attainment – pass or higher	85.3%	95.6%	100.0%

102. IP qualifications in 2023/24 admitted an average of 83.8% of applicants (91.4% in 2022/23; 84.2% in 2021/22).
103. IP qualification cohort sizes in 2023/24 varied from 13 to 114 with an average of 69. In 2022/23, this was 15 to 215 with an average of 80; in 2021/22, this was 16 to 93 with an average of 54.
104. An average of 95.6% (98.3% in 2022/23; 92.9% in 2021/22) of students passed the IP qualification, with two of the six qualifications having a pass rate of 100%. Meanwhile, the pass rate for the College of Optometrists' Therapeutic Final Common Assessment was 76% for the reporting year.
105. In terms of EDI cohort data, on average, 65.7% of IP students were aged over 30, 31.4% were aged 30-39 and 34.3% were aged 40 or over. 47.3% of were Asian and 42.6% were White. 65.5% were female.

Progression from entry-level qualifications

106. We compare IP registrants and IP trainee figures as an indicator of progression from entry level qualifications to IP⁴⁰. The percentage of Black IP trainees and Black IP registrants are similar (3.7% and 1.1% respectively). There is a higher percentage of Asian trainees than Asian IP registrants (47.3% and 26.2%). There is a lower percentage of White trainees than White IP registrants (42.6% and 57.5%). There is a lower percentage of male trainees to male IP registrants (32.3% and 38.2%).

³⁹ Enhancing the scope of practice in optical professionals, SPOKE Project 3, p6. January 2025

⁴⁰ Percentage figures were not available for contact lens optics this year due to the size disparity of the two providers.

Independent prescribing EDI data*

*Unless stated otherwise, all charts below feature average (mean) data.

Chart 17 – IP students by sex

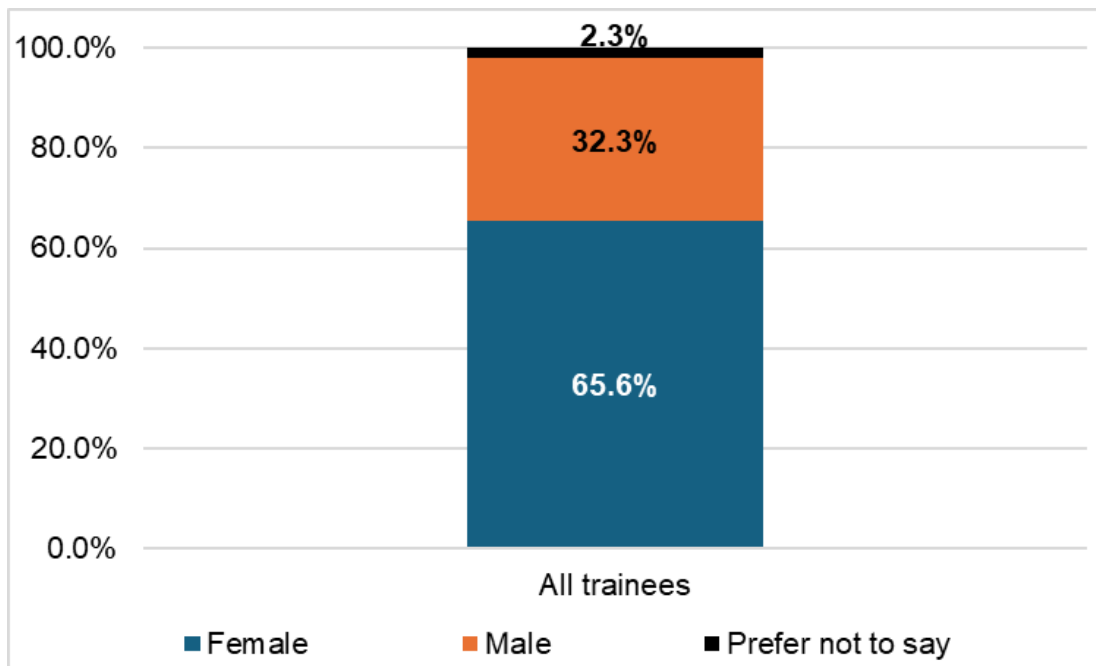


Chart 18 – IP students by age group

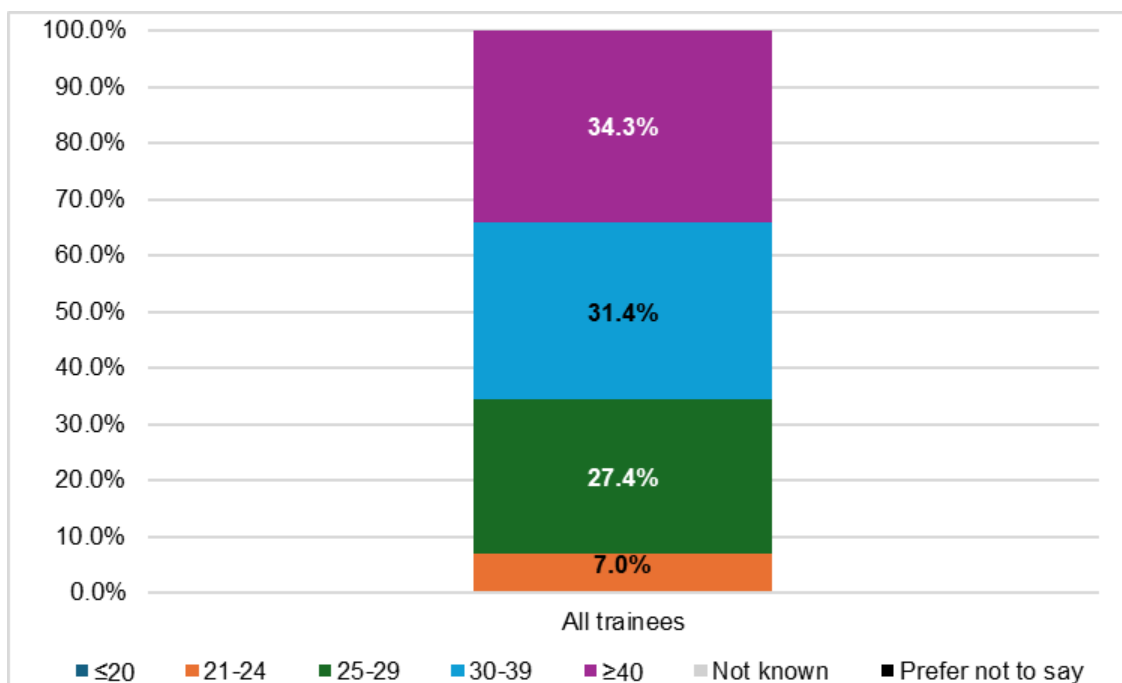


Chart 19 – IP students by ethnicity

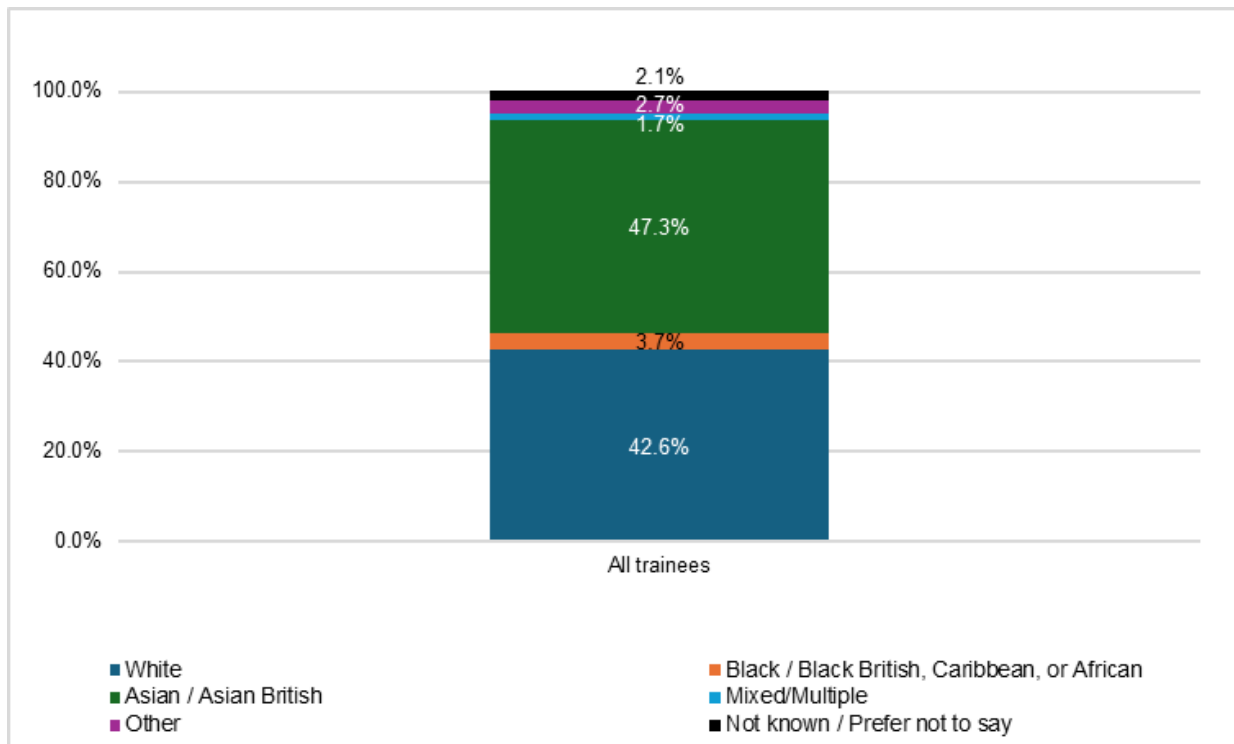
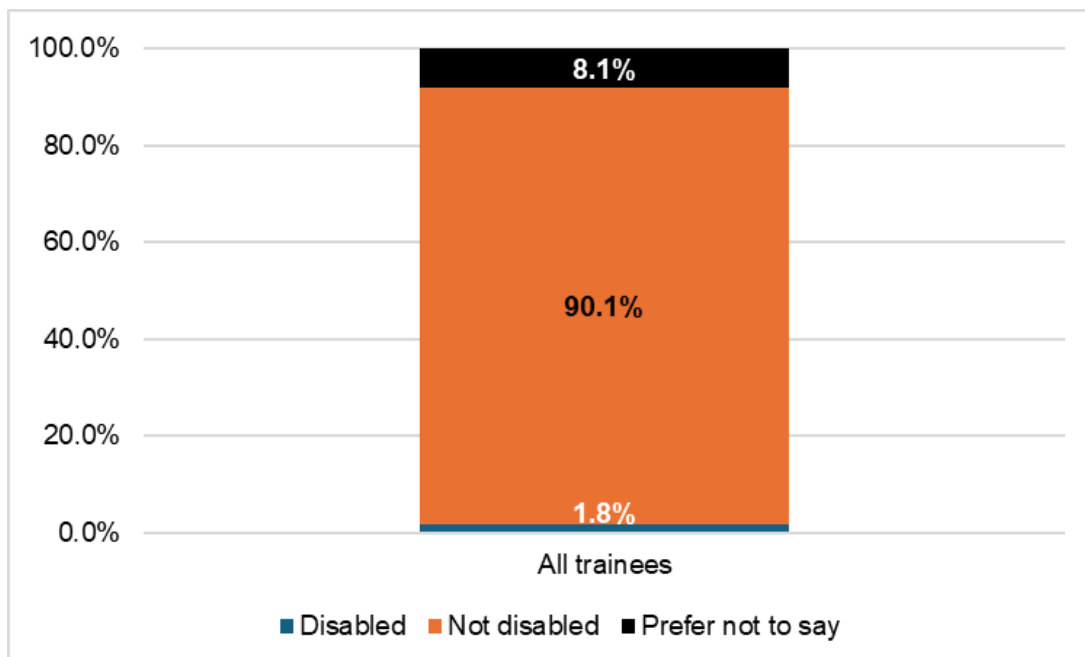


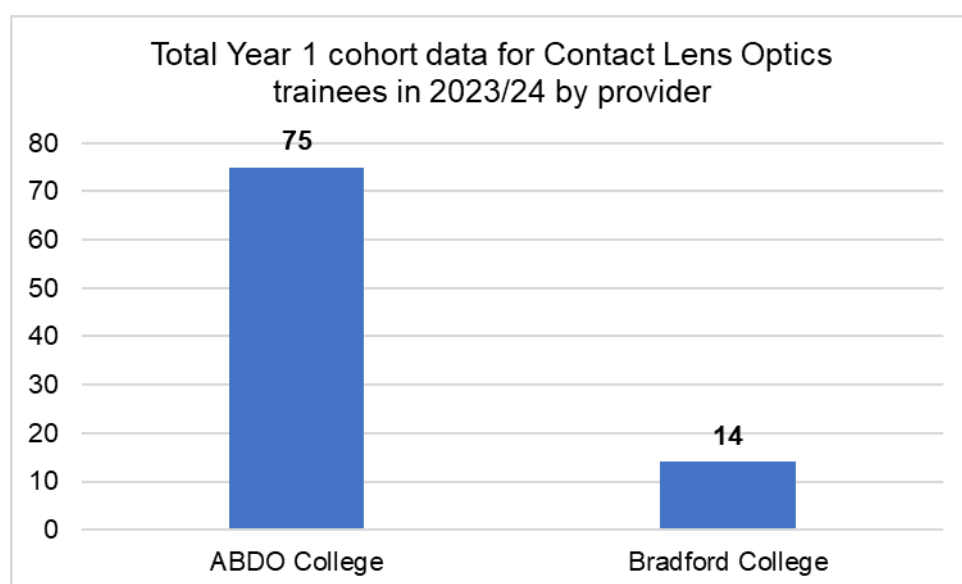
Chart 20 – IP students by disability



Contact lens opticians

107. Unless otherwise indicated, the comments in this section relate to all contact lens optician (CLO) qualifications, excluding the CLO Stage 2 approved qualification offered by the ABDO.
108. As of March 2025, 1,045 GOC registrants were registered as contact lens opticians, an increase of 3.9% on the previous year.
109. The number of trainees on contact lens optics (CLO) qualifications has grown over the last year (89 in 2023/24, 59 in 2022/23 and 66 in 2021/22).
110. One provider had by a comfortable distance most of all CLO trainees with 75 admitted in 2023/24, an 84.3% share.

Chart 21 – Number of CLO trainees by provider



Key data for contact lens opticians

Table 10 – Total students (CLO)

Total students	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Total students in year 1 cohort	66	59	89

Table 11 – Admissions and attainment (CLO)

Metric	Lowest	Average	Highest
Applicants admitted	92.6%	96.3%**	100.0%
Attainment – pass or higher*	N/A	N/A	N/A

* no qualifications have attainment data, however, **the ABDO (Stage 2 approved qualification) pass rate for 2023/24 is 78.46%**

** note: there were only two providers

Observations

111. Both CLO qualifications admitted over 92% of their applicants (83% in 2022/23). Recruitment to programmes increased since the previous year, and one provider has not admitted students to its course since 2020-21. Regarding cohort sizes, one provider recruited a cohort of 75 students, the other provider recruited 14 students.
112. EDI data shows that, like previous years, most CLO students were females: 65.2% (80.2% in 2022/23). Also, EDI data shows that 65.7% were aged 30 years or above, which is unsurprising for a qualification taken after initial qualification. Most students on CLO qualifications were white.
113. Most students gain two GOC-approved CLO qualifications either sequentially or simultaneously, staggering their theoretical and practical examinations, and taking different parts of the examination at different times, making it difficult to compare achievement.

Annex 1: Background information

Annual monitoring return requirements

- A1.1 The GOC is required to “keep informed of the nature of the instruction given by any approved training establishment to persons training as optometrists or dispensing opticians and of the assessments on the results of which approved qualifications are granted”, under s.13(1) Opticians Act 1989. Qualifications leading to a registrable therapeutic / independent prescribing (IP) or contact lens optician (CLO) specialism are also included within the GOC’s regulatory scope.
- A1.2 In executing this duty, we approve and quality assure qualifications leading to GOC registration or speciality registration, which includes all elements of training, learning and assessment that a provider must deliver for its students to be awarded a GOC approved qualification that meets the GOC’s requirements and to enable students to be eligible to register with the GOC as an optometrist (OP) or dispensing optician (DO), or with an IP or CLO specialty, upon successful completion of their training and assessment.
- A1.3 As part of our approval and quality assurance of qualifications, all providers are required to demonstrate how their approved qualification(s) meet our requirements, as set out in the ETR. We seek assurance from these providers in several ways, including quality assurance visits, notification of reportable events and changes, conditions management, and the compulsory AMR submission. We also scrutinise and note proposed adaptations to qualifications to ensure they meet the ETR requirements.

Annual monitoring returns process

- A1.4 Providers were required to report information for the period 1 September 2023 – 31 August 2024.
- A1.5 All providers of GOC approved qualifications(s) were required to submit information relating to qualification risks to delivery, lessons learned, and good practice.
- A1.6 We issued the AMR forms to providers on 1 November 2024. Providers were required to submit a completed form by 31 January 2025. Compliance with this year’s AMR process was good, with all returns submitted by 7 February 2025. Responses to additional queries were generally prompt. No compliance breaches occurred.
- A1.7 Every AMR must be signed by a ‘Responsible Officer’. The Responsible Officer is a staff member with sufficient authority to represent and bind the

provider and bears ultimate responsibility for the information submitted in the return. The Responsible Officer must only sign off the form when they are satisfied that the information gives a true and fair account of the qualification.

A1.8 We analysed the information to identify:

- current risks and issues relating to individual approved qualifications(s);
- themes, strengths, and risks within the optical education sector;
- the diversity of students within the optical sector;
- examples of good practice and lessons learnt; and
- ways the GOC's quality assurance activities could be developed.

A1.9 This report provides a high-level summary of the outcomes of the 2023/24 AMR process. In addition to this report, we produce a short report for each qualification (referred to as a 'qualification report') to provide specific feedback regarding the qualification's submission.

A1.10 The analysis and outcomes are based upon the information and data as calculated and submitted by providers of GOC approved qualifications. We have not sought to externally verify the information submitted.

A1.11 We consider all feedback from stakeholders regarding the 2023/24 AMR process and use this to help refine the AMR process.

A1.12 The publication of this report closes the 2023/24 AMR process.

Caveats to the GOC Approved Qualifications Report

A4.13 The AMR process is in continuous development and we will make refinements and improvements for each year of the process.

A4.14 The findings, analysis, and outcomes of this year's AMR process will be fed into the GOC Education Operations team's approval and quality assurance activities and used by the GOC Education Development team to develop policy and to inform implementation processes.

A4.15 Please note that the findings from providers outlined in this report are indicative and do not represent a formal position or policy of the GOC. The findings in this report should not be relied upon for advice or used for any other purpose and may not be representative.

A4.16 The analysis and outcomes contained within this report are based solely upon the information and data as calculated and submitted by the qualifications. The GOC has not sought to externally verify the information and data submitted. The responsible officer for each qualification has attested that the information submitted in the AMR gives a true and fair view of that qualification.

A4.17 The information provided by each professional association qualification in relation to student attainment (assessment pass rates) has been calculated on different bases (i.e., the basis for each calculation has been different) from the other professional association qualifications and the academic qualifications.

Annex 2: Data tables

A2.1 Unless otherwise specified, the data reported below relates to the period 1 September 2023 – 31 August 2024.

A2.2 Unless otherwise specified, the data reported below relates to ‘academic’ (non-professional association) qualifications.

A. Application data*

	Admissions Ratio (Applications:Admissions)		UCAS Points Offer (equivalent)	
	Average	Median	Average	Median
All Qualifications	42.1%	23.7%	130.5	136.0
Optometry	17.9%	17.0%	134.6	136.0
Dispensing optics	Dispensing optics information is not available given the disparate size of providers and that the dominant provider is not routed via UCAS			
Independent prescribing	83.8%	83.8%	N/A	N/A
Contact lens opticians	96.3%	96.3%	N/A	N/A

* The admissions ratio does not infer the overall volume of individual applicants who were unable to secure a place as each may have applied for more than one optical qualification.

**The admissions ratio does not infer the overall volume of individual applicants who were unable to secure a place as each may have applied for more than one optical qualification.

B. Average cohort data: The reporting year (2023/24)

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Optometry	78	75	72	21
Dispensing optics	289*	46	34	N/A
Independent prescribing	69	N/A	N/A	N/A
Contact lens opticians	30	N/A	N/A	N/A

* Largest DO provider

C. Average cohort data: Next reporting year (2024/25)

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Optometry	78	71	73	21
Dispensing optics	275*	266*	N/A	N/A
Independent prescribing	77	N/A	N/A	N/A
Contact lens opticians	42**	N/A	N/A	N/A

* Largest DO provider

** 1 provider only

D. Student average progression

	Progression from first year	Progression to the following year	Students completing the qualification
Optometry	78.8%	86.6%	90.5%
Dispensing optics	87.5%	91.6%	85.1%

E. Student average attainment: optometry, dispensing optics, and both qualifications

	Pass grade*	Fail
Both qualifications	96.2%	0.4%
Optometry	98.9%	0.4%
Dispensing optics	91.9%	0.5%

*a pass grade for optometry required by the GOC is a 2:2 degree or higher whilst for dispensing optics it may include a "pass" or other grade such as a 2:2 degree or higher.

F. Student average attainment: Independent Prescribing and Contact lens opticians

	Pass	Fail
Independent prescribing	95.6%	4.4%
Contact lens opticians	N/A*	N/A*

* No students in the 2023/24 cohort had completed the programme at the time of submission due to the minimum 18-month education and training period required.

G. Student average attainment: Professional Associations

	Pass	Fail	Results (as a % of total number of students examined)
Professional Association (dispensing & contact lens opticians)	51.7%	48.3%	50.5%
Professional Association (independent prescribing & optometry)	85.8%	14.2%	N/A

H. National Student Survey – average satisfaction score by category

	All qualifications	Optometry	Dispensing optics	Subjects allied to medicine
Teaching	94.1%	91.5%	96.7%	84.8%
Learning Opportunities	89.9%	88.0%	91.8%	82.3%
Assessment & Feedback	86.5%	80.4%	92.6%	77.1%
Academic Support	89.7%	89.1%	90.3%	81.0%
Organisation & Management	81.9%	85.2%	78.6%	64.9%
Learning Resources	90.0%	86.3%	93.7%	87.5%
Student Voice	84.3%	79.9%	88.7%	72.5%
Student Union	82.3%	77.6%	87.0%	74.7%

I. EDI – Average gender data

	Female	Male
All qualifications	69.5%	30.4%
Optometry	70.3%	29.6%
Dispensing optics	68.3%	31.8%
Independent prescribing	65.5%	32.3%
Contact lens opticians	65.2%	34.8%

J. EDI – Average age data

	20 & under	21-24	25-29	30-39	40 and over	Unknown / Prefer not to say
All qualifications	45.3%	22.9%	13.3%	11.8%	6.2%	0.3%
Optometry	61.5%	21.8%	6.5%	6.6%	2.9%	0.5%
Dispensing optics	19.8%	24.6%	24.0%	19.9%	11.3%	0.0%
Independent prescribing	0.0%	7.0%	27.4%	31.4%	34.3%	0.0%
Contact lens opticians	0.0%	2.2%	10.8%	42.6%	23.1%	10.7%

K. EDI – average disability data

	Known disability	No known disability	Unspecified / Prefer not to say
All qualifications	12.6%	87.5%	0.4%
Optometry	14.9%	84.5%	0.6%
Dispensing optics	7.7%	92.4%	0.0%
Independent prescribing	1.8%	90.1%	8.1%
Contact lens opticians	<0.5%*	98.7%	<0.5%*

* data was suppressed for one supplier due to small numbers so an exact figure cannot be given

L. EDI – Average ethnicity data

	White	Black	Asian	Mixed	Other	Not known
All qualifications	37.5%	3.0%	55.3%	1.9%	3.8%	2.7%
Optometry	28.0%	3.8%	60.9%	1.7%	3.5%	3.0%
Dispensing optics*	52.3%	1.3%	44.0%	2.2%	4.3%	1.8%
Independent prescribing	42.6%	3.7%	47.3%	1.7%	2.7%	2.1%
Contact lens opticians	74.3%	<1.0%*	23.2%	<1.0%*	0.0%	<1.0%*

* data was suppressed for one supplier due to small numbers so an exact figure cannot be given

** data was suppressed for one supplier due to small numbers so a total of 100% is not given

M. EDI – Average refugee status data

	All students/trainees	Year 1 students/trainees
All qualifications	<0.1%	<0.1%
Optometry	0.8%	0.6%
Dispensing optics	0.0%	0.0%
Independent prescribing	0.0%	N/A
Contact lens opticians	0.0%	N/A

N. EDI – Average English language status data

	All students/trainees		Year 1 students/trainees	
	English	Other	English	Other
All qualifications	96.8%	3.2%	93.3%	6.8%
Optometry	99.5%	0.5%	91.0%	9.0%
Dispensing optics	94.4%	5.6%	100.0%	0.0%
Independent prescribing	100.0%	0.0%	N/A	N/A
Contact lens opticians	100.0%	0.0%	N/A	N/A

Annex 3 – National Student Survey categories

#	Question	Category
1	How good are teaching staff at explaining things?	Teaching
2	How often do teaching staff make the subject engaging?	
3	How often is the course intellectually stimulating?	
4	How often does your course challenge you to achieve your best work?	
5	To what extent have you had the chance to explore ideas and concepts in depth?	Learning Opportunities
6	How well does your course introduce subjects and skills in a way that builds on what you have already learned?	
7	To what extent have you had the chance to bring together information and ideas from different topics?	
8	To what extent does your course have the right balance of directed and independent study?	
9	How well has your course developed your knowledge and skills that you think you will need for your future?	Assessment & Feedback
10	How clear were the marking criteria used to assess your work?	
11	How fair has the marking and assessment been on your course?	
12	How well have assessments allowed you to demonstrate what you have learned?	
13	How often have you received assessment feedback on time?	Academic Support
14	How often does feedback help you to improve your work?	
15	How easy was it to contact teaching staff when you needed to?	Organisation & Management
16	How well have teaching staff supported your learning?	
17	How well organised is your course?	Learning Resources
18	How well were any changes to teaching on your course communicated?	
19	How well have the IT resources and facilities supported your learning?	
20	How well have the library resources (e.g. books, online services and learning spaces) supported your learning?	Student Voice
21	How easy is it to access subject specific resources (e.g. equipment, facilities, software) when you need them?	
22	To what extent do you get the right opportunities to give feedback on your course?	
23	To what extent are students' opinions about the course valued by staff?	

24	How clear is it that students' feedback on the course is acted on?	
25	How well does the students' union (association or guild) represent students' academic interests?	Student Union

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Published September 2025

