

**BEFORE THE FITNESS TO PRACTISE COMMITTEE
OF THE GENERAL OPTICAL COUNCIL**

GENERAL OPTICAL COUNCIL

F(24)14 & 15

AND

ADEEL IQBAL (SO-15327)

**DETERMINATION OF A SUBSTANTIVE REVIEW
15 AUGUST 2025**

Committee Members:	Clive Powell (Chair/Lay) Nigel Pilkington (Lay) Ian Hanson (Lay) Amit Jinabhai (Optometrist) Caroline Clark (Optometrist)
Legal adviser:	Austin Stoton
GOC Presenting Officer:	Leonie Hinds
Registrant:	Present and represented
Registrant representative:	Nicholas Hall instructed by Eleanor Curzon (AOP)
Hearings Officer:	Natasha Bance
Outcome:	Not Impaired

DETERMINATION

Introduction

1. On the 15th August 2025 the fitness to practise Committee convened to consider a Substantive Order Review.

Documents

2. The Committee were sighted of:
 - Witness statement and exhibit from Witness A
 - referral email to GOC with enclosures 14/11/2023 6-20
 - statement from Witness B
 - resignation email from Adeel Iqbal
 - Witness statement and exhibit from Witness C
 - Witness statement and exhibit from Ms B:
 - Exhibit Ms B/01 – screenshots of messages from Adeel Iqbal
 - The Registrants CRM page
 - Determination of the Substantive Hearing
 - Notice of Substantive Order Review Hearing
 - Skeleton Argument for Substantive Order Review Hearing
 - Reflective Statement
 - Reflective Statement
 - The Essentials of Data Protection
 - Understanding Professional Boundaries
 - GDPR in Health and Social Care –
 - Professional Boundaries in Health and Social Care – Level 2
 - References from Ms A, Mr B
 - Positive disclosures from the Disclosure and Barring Service
 - A Specsavers pre-registration letter of August 2025

Background

3. Between the 28 October and the 8 November 2024, the Registrant faced fitness to practise proceedings for the following allegations:

ALLEGATIONS

Allegations 2022-354 (Case 1)

The Council alleges that you, Mr Adeel Iqbal (SO-15327), a registered student optometrist:

- 1. On or around 13 October 2022, you failed to adhere to GDPR and/or*
- 2. Breached data protection requirements in that you obtained Ms B's mobile number by accessing Patient A's records without her consent and texting her;*
- 3. Between October 2022-November 2022 outside of work hours, you failed to maintain appropriate boundaries with Ms B in that you:*
 - a. Sent Ms B inappropriate text messages to her personal social media platforms unrelated to optical services and unrelated to Patient A's clinical care; and/or*
 - b. On multiple occasions contacted Ms B via "WhatsApp" without her consent;*
 - i. You sent messages relating to financial trades;*
 - ii. You sent a message saying "Hi I just realised I've added the wrong number. I must've entered one of the digits wrong. I am incredibly sorry for disturbing you. Wont (sic) happen again x" or words to that effect;*
 - iii. You asked numerous questions about her personal life*
 - c. On multiple occasions contacted Ms B via a social media platform "Instagram" without her consent and sent her multiple videos and images of footages from Syria of men wearing army uniforms holding weapons and/or*
 - ~~*d. On multiple occasions contacted Ms B via a social media platform "Instagram" without her consent and sent her multiple inappropriate videos*~~

AMENDED TO:

On one occasion, added Ms B as a friend on social media platform "Snapchat" without her consent

- 4. Your conduct at 1) and/or 2) and/or 3 above was:*
 - a. Unprofessional or otherwise inappropriate in that you:*
 - i. failed to maintain appropriate boundaries; and/or*
 - ii. knew or ought to have known that such conduct was not suitable in a student optician-client relationship.*

And by virtue of the facts set out above, your fitness to undertake training is impaired by reason of misconduct.

Allegations 2023-006 (Case 2)

The Council alleges that you, Mr Adeel Iqbal (SO-15327), a registered student optometrist, whilst working at [redacted] Specsavers that:

1. *Around December 2022 to April 2023, you acted inappropriately towards Ms 1, in that you:*
 - a. *Failed to maintain appropriate boundaries in that you touched and/or rubbed Ms 1's shoulder making her feel uncomfortable.*
2. *On or around September 2022, you acted inappropriately towards Ms 2, in that you whispered in Ms 2's ear, '[redacted] the monarchy' or words to that affect making her feel uncomfortable.*
3. *On an unknown date around December 2022 to April 2023 you approached Ms 2 and had an inappropriate conversation about a patient saying words to the effect:*
 - a. *'It's getting heated in there'*
 - b. *In response to 3.a) above, Ms 2 replied 'why' and you responded, 'she's horny'*
 - c. *Your comments caused Ms 2 to feel uncomfortable*
4. *On 9 January 2023, you acted inappropriately towards Mr 4, in that you approached Mr 4 from behind and poked him by the waist;*
5. *Your conduct at 1), 2), 3) and/or 4) above was:*
 - a. *inappropriate in that you:*
 - i. *failed to maintain appropriate boundaries; and/or*
 - ii. *knew or ought to have known that such conduct was not appropriate*
 - iii. *your colleagues were made to feel uncomfortable by your actions*

And by virtue of the facts set out above, your fitness to undertake training is impaired by reason of misconduct.

2. The Fitness to Practice Committee made the following findings:

Facts found proven:

Case 1 (2022-354) Allegations 1, 2, 3a, 3b, 3bi, 3bii, 3biii, 3c, 3d (as amended), 4ai and 4aii admitted and proved.

Case 2 (2023-006) Allegations 1a, 2, 3a, 3b, 3c, 4 and 5ai, 5aii and 5aiii.

Misconduct

Found in relation to **Case 1 (2022-354)** Allegations 1, 2, 3a, 3b, 3bi, 3bii, 3biii, 3c, 3d (as amended), 4ai and 4aii.

Impairment

Fitness to train currently impaired

Sanction

A nine month suspension order with review.

Background to the allegations

4. Mr Adeel Iqbal (SO-15327) registered with the Council on 9 October 2019 as a Student Optometrist.
5. At all material times, the Registrant was a Student Optometrist at Specsavers Optical Group Ltd, working at the branches in [redacted].
6. The Registrant was employed by Specsavers, [redacted] on 15 August 2022.
7. On 14 November 2022, the Council received an email with enclosures from Witness A, Ophthalmic Director at Specsavers, [redacted]. Witness A informed the GOC that the [redacted] Practice had received complaints from Ms B against the Registrant.
8. By way of background, on 13 October 2022, Ms B attended the [redacted] Practice with her daughter, Patient A to collect her glasses (MB75). After this date, Ms B alleged that the Registrant began messaging her on her personal number and her social media platforms: WhatsApp, Instagram and Snapchat about material that is unrelated to optical services.
9. On 9 November 2022, Ms B contacted Witness C, the Practice Manager and reported the Registrant's alleged conduct. Ms B also submitted a complaint about the Registrant's alleged conduct to Hampshire Constabulary.
10. After receiving Ms B's complaint, the [redacted] Practice formally notified the Registrant of an internal investigation. The Registrant was suspended from his employment pending the internal investigation. The internal investigation concluded on 23 November 2022. There was no disciplinary case against the Registrant, and the suspension was lifted.
11. In around November 2022, at the request of the Registrant, he was transferred to the Specsavers practice in [redacted].

12. On 5 January 2023, Witness A informed the Council that there were new complaints against the Registrant from staff members at the [redacted] Practice. Mr A provided the Council with three statements from the staff members from the [redacted] Practice who detailed their concerns against the Registrant's conduct.
13. On a Saturday before Christmas 2022, Ms 1 who was an apprentice Optical Assistant, alleges that she was touched on the shoulder by the Registrant as he placed paracetamol and chocolates on her desk, saying "*it's just for you*". This made her feel uncomfortable.
14. Ms 2 was an Optical Assistant who alleges that the Registrant made two sets of inappropriate comments towards her:
 - a) In September 2022, shortly after the late Queen had died, the Registrant whispered to her "[redacted] the monarchy". There were customers on the premises and Ms 2 felt uncomfortable at how close the Registrant had got to her; and
 - b) On another date, the Registrant left his test room and approached Ms 2 at the repairs desk and said, "*it's getting heated in there*". On being asked why, he responded, "*she's horny*" and "*she's horny, I can tell*". Ms 2 said she hoped he was not entertaining it, and he stopped smirking and replied, "*oh no I'm not*". He did not elaborate on this further when asked later in the day.
15. On 9 January 2023, the Registrant approached Mr 4, an optometrist who also worked at the [redacted] Practice, from behind and poked him around his waist with his hands. Mr 4 pushed the Registrant away immediately and was made to feel uncomfortable. This incident is captured on two CCTV clips (one is zoomed in). The Council submits this incident is clearly shown on the footage, including Mr 4's reaction.
16. A local investigation about the new alleged concerns was conducted, however, it never concluded because the Registrant raised a grievance against the Directors, including Witness A. The investigation about these concerns did not reach a conclusion locally as the Registrant had resigned.
17. The Council sought to join the two cases in an application on 25 June 2024, citing a significant nexus between the two allegations in that they relate to the same Registrant, and the same broad complaint being his inappropriate behaviour towards patients and colleagues. The Registrant consented to the joinder application, and it was granted on 24 July 2024.
18. There are no previous adverse regulatory findings against the Registrant.

19. The substantive hearing Committee found various aggravating factors that there was an abuse of trust and that one of the complainants had suffered psychological harm consequently the Registrant had attempted to minimize his input. They had been concerned about the Registrants candour.

The hearing

20. Neither the Council nor the Registrant called any evidence.

Submissions

21. The Council had received various documents from the Registrant but had not come to any conclusion as to current impairment. The GOC indicated that it was “*neutral*” as to whether the Registrant was currently impaired. The Committee did not find this approach of assistance.
22. In the Registrant’s bundle the Registrant indicated that he had fully accepted responsibility for breaching GDPR standards by accessing and using personal contact information for non-clinical purposes, causing distress to an individual (Ms B). He expressed deep remorse for the harm caused. He stated he recognised the importance of maintaining clear boundaries and reflected on how his actions impacted colleagues, patients and the profession as a whole. He provided evidence of CPD courses that he had completed to enhance his understanding of professional boundaries.
23. Mr. Hall indicated that the case was now three years ago when the Registrant was [redacted] and accepts he was immature and thoughtless. The Registrant is now [redacted]. It was submitted he has ‘learnt his lesson’.
24. Mr. Hall submitted that there would be oversight of the Registrant and training before practicing unsupervised, such is his progression within the profession at this stage. He suggested that there was little more that the Registrant could do to show his remediation.

Legal Advice

25. The legal adviser advised that the Committee was concerned with whether the Registrant was currently impaired. The question of impairment is one for the professional judgement of the Committee and not one which is assessed by reference to any standard of proof. The onus is on the Registrant to prove that they are not currently impaired. The function of the Committee is to conduct an assessment afresh, irrespective of any earlier decisions that have been made. The Committee were advised to act proportionately, balancing competing interests and ensuring that the consequences of any order for the Registrant

are not disproportionate to the risk identified in the case, the profession of optometry or to upholding the standards of the profession or of maintenance of the regulation of the profession.

Findings regarding impairment

26. When considering the issue of impairment the Committee reminded itself that it was only concerned with case 1.
27. The Committee noted that, although the Registrant had submitted a number of documents but much of it appeared to have been produced proximate to the hearing and met the minimum standard required which gave rise to concern as to whether the learning from these courses had been properly embedded into his professional practice.
28. The Committee identified some omissions in the Registrant's reflection statement. In particular, the statement provided no explanation for why he had contacted the complainant, nor any indication of how he had addressed his conduct. While the statement acknowledged that the Registrant had made contact *via* Instagram, it failed to address the fact that contact had been made through multiple communication platforms over a period of weeks.
29. In light of these factors, the Committee was satisfied that the Registrant had taken adequate steps to remediate the concerns identified. On balance, the Committee concluded that the Registrant presented a *de minimis* level of risk. Accordingly, it determined that the Registrant's fitness to train is not currently impaired.
30. As the Committee has determined that the Registrant's fitness to train is not currently impaired, there is no continuing basis for the existing Suspension Order. In accordance with its powers on review, the Committee directs that the Suspension Order be revoked with immediate effect. The Committee considers that it would be disproportionate and unjust to allow the suspension to remain in force where no current impairment has been found. The Registrant is therefore entitled to resume unrestricted training.

Chair of the Committee: Clive Powell

Signature 

Date: 15 August 2025

Registrant: Adeel Iqbal

Signature *Present remotely and received via e-mail* **Date:** 15 August 2025

FURTHER INFORMATION
Transcript
A full transcript of the hearing will be made available for purchase in due course.
Appeal
Any appeal against an order of the Committee must be lodged with the relevant court within 28 days of the service of this notification. If no appeal is lodged, the order will take effect at the end of that period. The relevant court is shown at section 23G(4)(a)-(c) of the Opticians Act 1989 (as amended).
Professional Standards Authority
<p>This decision will be reported to the Professional Standards Authority (PSA) under the provisions of section 29 of the NHS Reform and Healthcare Professions Act 2002. PSA may refer this case to the High Court of Justice in England and Wales, the Court of Session in Scotland or the High Court of Justice in Northern Ireland as appropriate if they decide that a decision has been insufficient to protect the public and/or should not have been made, and if they consider that referral is desirable for the protection of the public.</p> <p>Where a registrant can appeal against a decision, the Authority has 40 days beginning with the day which is the last day in which you can appeal. Where a registrant cannot appeal against the outcome of a hearing, the Authority's appeal period is 56 days beginning with the day in which notification of the decision was served on you. PSA will notify you promptly of a decision to refer. A letter will be</p>

sent by recorded delivery to your registered address (unless PSA has been notified by the GOC of a change of address).

Further information about the PSA can be obtained from its website at www.professionalstandards.org.uk or by telephone on 020 7389 8030.

Contact

If you require any further information, please contact the Council's Hearings Manager at Level 29, One Canada Square, London, E14 5AA or by telephone, on 020 7580 3898.