

CORPORATE STRATEGY

2025 – 2030





Introduction

This strategy outlines our vision, mission and strategic objectives for 2025-2030, sustaining our success as a high performing regulator, building on our strengths and addressing the areas where we wish to improve. Our ambition remains to be a world-class regulator – agile, robust and effective in the deployment of our regulatory responsibilities, well regarded by stakeholders and continuing to meet all the Professional Standards Authority’s (PSA) Standards of Good Regulation. The strategy is supported by the following documents:

- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy
- Financial strategy
- Digital strategy
- People plan
- Business performance reporting framework

We have described our strategic direction at a high level. We will provide more detailed information on how we will achieve each objective in our annual business plans and through our website.

We begin the strategy from a strong position, with positive stakeholder relationships, sound finances, including an appropriate level of reserves, and having delivered major investment in digital transformation that promises to improve our customer service.

We will continue to develop our internal capacity to deliver the ambition and shift in approach contained in this corporate strategy, by implementing supporting financial, people, digital and EDI strategies to support the achievement of our proposed mission, vision and strategic objectives by 2030. The focus of this strategy is on areas of change, but we are committed to continuous improvement across our core statutory functions such as maintaining the registers, approving qualifications, and managing our fitness to practise operations. Also, the effective realisation of major reforms delivered in the current strategy period, such as in education and training, updated professional standards and digital transformation, will continue to be supported and adjustments made as necessary.

WE BEGIN
THE STRATEGY
FROM A STRONG
POSITION

Vision, mission and strategic objectives

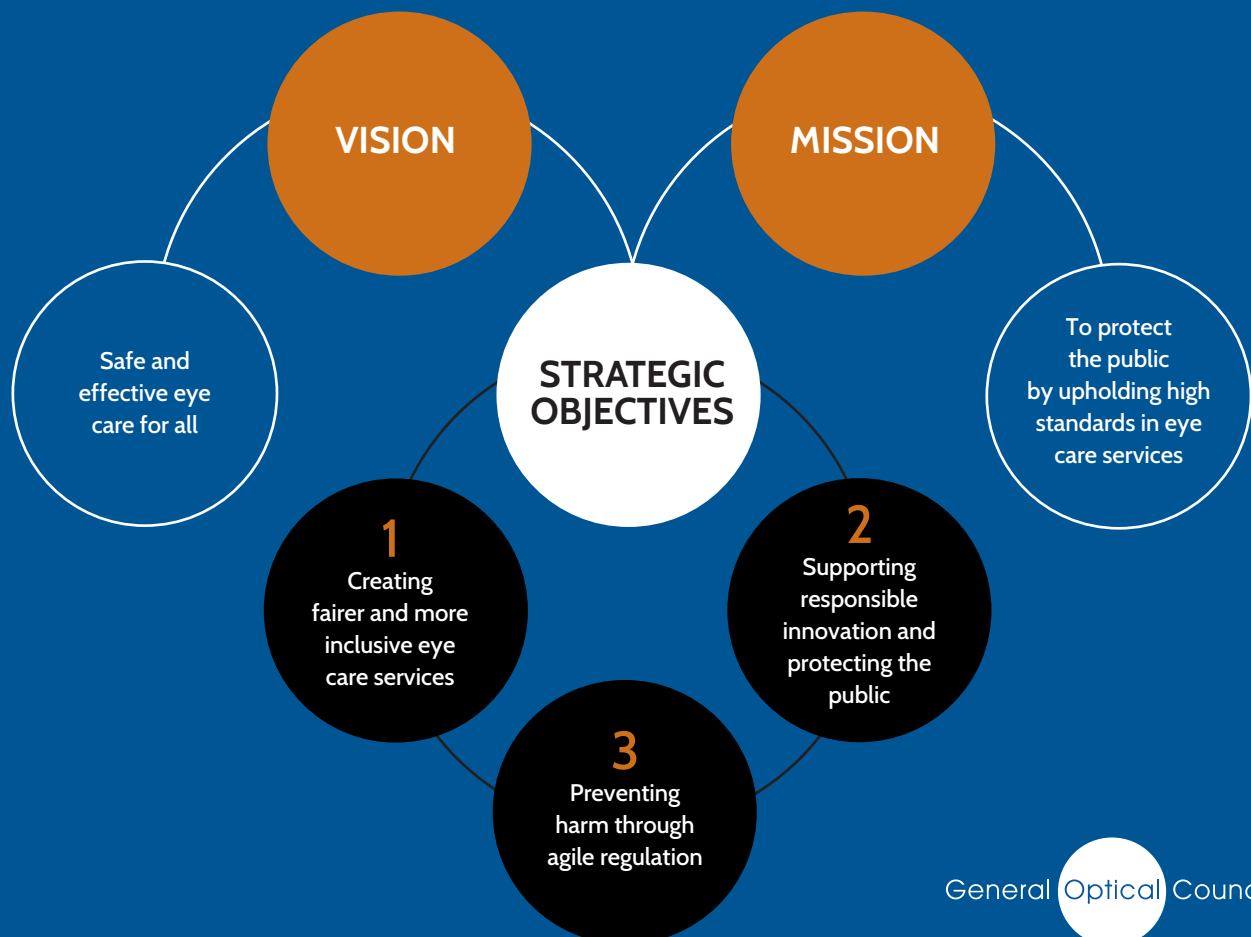
Our vision, mission and strategic objectives are illustrated below and outlined in the following pages. The objectives are intersecting and will naturally overlap. For example, the first objective rightly gives due prominence to our work, with others, to addressing inequalities, but progressing these issues will cut across all our work.

In identifying our three strategic objectives, we have considered both external and internal aspects of our work. The first two objectives

are externally focused, and the third is more internally focused.

We recognise we are one of many stakeholders in a wider landscape of professionals and organisations working to improve eye care in all four nations of the United Kingdom for the benefit of patients and service-users. We will continue to actively work collaboratively with partners across the sector to achieve our collective vision for change.

OUR FIVE YEAR PLAN



Creating fairer and more inclusive eye care services

SATISFACTION
WITH SERVICE
REMAINS
HIGH



There is much to celebrate about the last five years. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, public trust in registrants and satisfaction with service remains high. More people are turning to registrants for eye issues as their first port of call instead of GPs. Registrants are acquiring new skills and taking on more clinical responsibilities, enabling patients to access a wider range of eye care services in their communities. The sector is well placed to take advantage of the Government's stated plans for three shifts in the focus of healthcare: from hospital to community; analogue to digital; and sickness to prevention.

Even so, there remains significant preventable sight loss. And there is evidence to suggest that the successes of the last five years are not equally shared, with some groups of patients facing higher barriers to accessing services and getting worse outcomes. For example, our public perceptions survey shows that people from ethnic minorities are less likely to get their sight tested. Also, people with disabilities are more likely to report things going wrong during their visit and more generally that vulnerability has a significant impact on both access and experience. External surveys have highlighted the impact of the cost of living crisis as a barrier to accessing eye care. Availability of enhanced services differs both between nations and within nations.

While our equalities data shows the registrant

base is more diverse than ever before, our registrant survey shows that experiences of working in the sector are unequal. Abusive behaviour, harassment and discrimination are higher in this sector than elsewhere in the NHS and more likely to be experienced by some population groups. We risk losing good professionals when demand for their services is rising, and the unsafe working environments these behaviours create puts patient safety at risk.

Such problems are not unique to this sector. Other healthcare regulators are giving these issues more attention, while the PSA is enhancing its scrutiny of healthcare regulators on EDI issues and encouraging greater involvement in addressing health inequalities. EDI will be embedded across our work and throughout the professional lifecycle from education and training through registration, setting standards and fitness to practise. However, while regulation can positively contribute to this arena, it cannot provide all the solutions. Since these issues are structural and multifaceted, addressing them will require a sector-wide effort with partnership and collaboration across many actors.

Priorities in 2025-30 under this theme will include:

- Using research insight and data to highlight inequalities facing the public, patients and professionals
- Deploying our regulatory levers to help reduce barriers to people accessing services, support those in vulnerable circumstances to receive high quality care and tackle negative working environments
- Monitoring for and addressing any disproportionate representation of groups with protected characteristics in the GOC's regulatory processes.

Supporting responsible innovation and protecting the public

Developments in technology, service delivery, business models, commissioning and registrants' working patterns are changing the face of eye care. These changes present both opportunities and challenges that regulation must respond to.

Unlike some other regulators, we do not approve products or services. This means we do not have a direct role to facilitate innovation. However, we will contribute to an innovation friendly environment by engaging with innovators to explain the regulatory framework, by making sure our standards of practice are clear and proportionate, and by ensuring that the qualifications we approve and our registrants' continuing education and professional development (CPD) better equips them to meet future patient needs. Legislative reform should create a stable framework that will enable all businesses to enjoy the benefits of regulation as well as support innovation and external investment. Lastly, we will monitor levels of innovation and barriers in our business registrant survey.

There are growing concerns about workforce shortages in some geographic areas. By realising the full benefits of our education and training reforms, thinking strategically about post-registration qualifications and delivering a more flexible system of CPD, we will use our regulatory levers to increase workforce capacity and support registrants to develop their roles to better meet patient eye care needs. Striking the right balance between supporting

responsible innovation, protecting the public and maintaining public confidence in the professions and businesses we regulate is likely to be a recurring theme during a period of potentially rapid change. Innovation has transformed eye care in recent decades and future developments promise to reduce barriers to access and deliver better outcomes. Balanced with this, as registrants undertake more complex clinical work, regulation must respond to a changing risk profile. Our focus will be on creating a flexible, agile regulatory framework that supports innovation while maintaining the necessary safeguards.

Reform of the Opticians Act will modernise our approach to business regulation and plug important gaps in public protection. Updating our business standards will be an early priority in the strategy period. Legislative reform will also give us freedom to make and amend our own rules, some of which are unchanged for many years, making us better able to support the sector to adapt to a changing environment.

Priorities in 2025-30 under this theme will include:

- Supporting registrants to deliver more clinical eye care by realising the full benefits of our education and training reforms and taking a more strategic approach to post-registration qualifications
- Reforming our CPD system so that it focuses on the quality rather than quantity of professional development and supports the expanded clinical roles registrants will perform within service redesign; and
- Extending regulation to all businesses carrying out restricted activities underpinned by updated standards for business registrants.

WE WILL SUPPORT REGISTRANTS TO DEVELOP THEIR ROLES



Preventing harm through agile regulation

Our style of regulation will evolve to meet modern expectations of regulators and face current challenges. As in healthcare, so in regulation, preventing harm before it arises is better than treating problems after the fact. This focus on prevention will cut across our work underpinned by strengthening our approach to data and insight and translating this into effective action. Linked to this, we will exercise proactive leadership on topical issues and collaborate on solutions to issues facing the sector.

We will exploit opportunities to share our registration and survey data to support commissioners to plan services better and for patients to locate and benefit from the wider range of services being delivered by registrants in their communities.

Inquiries into poor patient care often highlight a failure to listen to the concerns of patients or service users. The GOC exists to protect

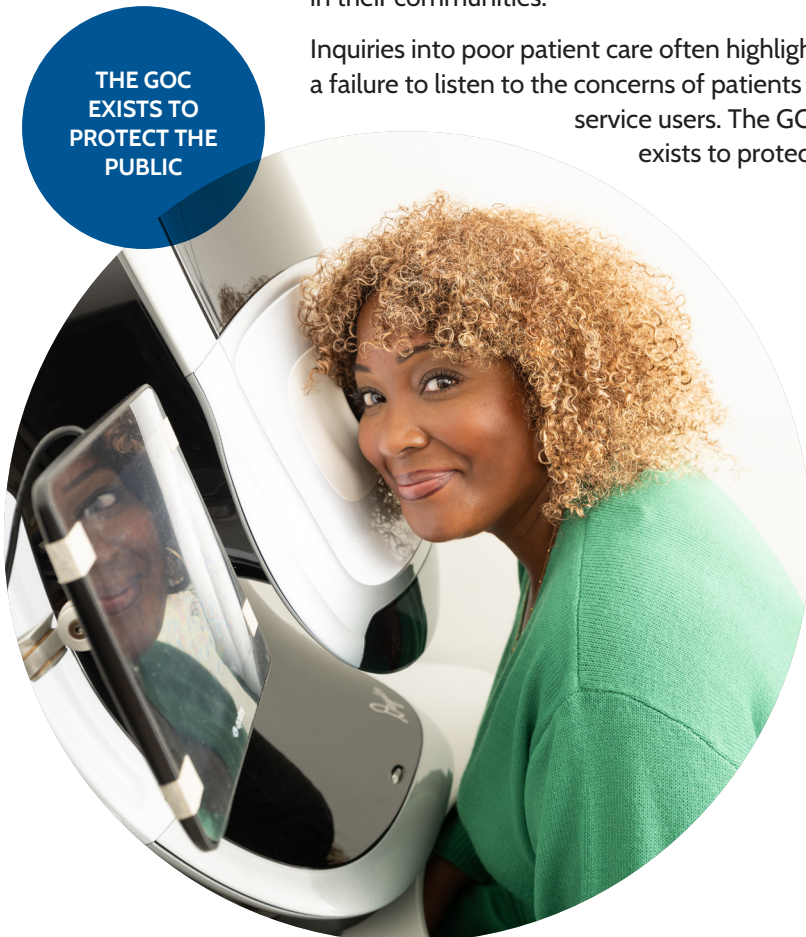
the public, so we intend to strengthen the user voice across our work, enabling us to put the interests of the public and patients at the heart of regulation. This includes better understanding the views and experiences of the public and patients through the research we commission, building our relationships with organisations representing these groups, and ensuring these interests are at the forefront in shaping the decisions we take.

We will continue to actively prepare for legislative reform to the Opticians Act, although the timing is unknown. Further, Charity Commission requirements, revised PSA standards and other external drivers, may require changes to our governance, financial management and operating model. While often invisible to stakeholders these arrangements provide the firm foundations underpinning all our activities.

Priorities in 2025-30 under this theme will include:

- Putting the public and patients at the heart of our regulatory approach by investing more in our research activities, engaging better with patient groups and strengthening the user voice in our decision-making structures
- Shifting to a more anticipatory model of regulation that seeks to prevent harm based on a risk-based, data-driven approach that joins up our intelligence and insight, and translates this into effective action
- Supporting workforce planning and patient choice by collecting better data about registrants and improving how we publish and share this with others
- Changing our governance arrangements and other internal processes in response to legislative reform, including through the creation of a unitary board and reviewing our advisory committee structure.

THE GOC
EXISTS TO
PROTECT THE
PUBLIC



Financing our strategy

Effective financial management, the optimisation of our resources, and improving our financial resilience will enable the effective realisation of our strategy.

We expect the external financial environment to remain challenging and volatile. Our ambition, therefore, is to match delivery of our 2025-30 corporate strategy within the total resources available, underpinned by five financial objectives:

- Financial sustainability and stability
- Transparency and accountability in financial management
- Maintain appropriate reserves for contingencies and strategic initiatives
- Deliver value for money
- Maintain a low to moderate risk appetite in our financial management

Our income will continue to be derived primarily from the fees we charge registrants to enter or remain on the register and we will not seek to develop new sources of income. We expect overall income levels to increase modestly, in line with inflation and register growth, although reform to business regulation may provide higher revenue levels.

Efficiencies achieved from initiatives including IT transformation and moving to smaller office accommodation will help us to minimise registrant fee increases.

We will review our approach to setting registrant fees, enhancing fairness, and delivering value for money, ensuring that the fees we set are sufficient to meet our operational costs and to maintain our reserves within agreed limits.

MEASURING SUCCESS

We will use a performance reporting framework to help us measure the success of the strategy. Our approach recognises that we are a single stakeholder in a wider system and that regulatory interventions alone will often be insufficient to bring change. There may be a significant lag between an intervention and observable change, and it will often not be possible to attribute cause and effect. Even so, it is important to track the direction of travel in a structured way by using a range of measures to provide a rounded picture.



Our approach to performance reporting will include:

- Continuing to report on key performance indicators on our operational performance and progress on delivery of business plan activities through public Council papers and in our annual report and accounts
- Returns to the PSA to support its assessment of our performance
- Embedding a benefits realisation approach in our project work
- A basket of indicators approach to measuring high-level outcomes evidenced through our surveys, internal data and reliable sources of external data

The PSA plans to revise its Standards of Good Regulation during the lifetime of this strategy and we may need to make reporting changes to satisfy its requirements.