



Standards for Optical Businesses

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These standards are presently in DRAFT form and should be read in conjunction with the GOC Standards Framework.

Our *Standards for Optical Businesses* define the standards we expect of optical businesses to protect the public and promote high standards of care.

The General Optical Council

The General Optical Council's role as the UK regulator for the optical professions gives us statutory responsibility for setting standards.

How do I use and apply the standards?

This document sets out the 12 standards that you must meet as a registered optical business. These standards are not listed in order of priority and include standards relating to both behaviour and clinical care.

These standards are a framework for applying your professional judgement and therefore you will need to consider how it is appropriate to apply them within the context of your business. To assist you in doing so, we have provided additional information about our expectations under each standard.

Who do these standards apply to?

These standards apply to all optical businesses who are registered with the General Optical Council. We also encourage optical businesses who are not registered with us to comply with the standards so that they can assist, encourage and support individual optometrists, dispensing opticians and students to comply with their individual professional standards, and ensure they are providing good quality patient care.

Following a position adopted by the GOC Council in July 2015, we will be seeking an extension of our powers through our legislative reform project to include compulsory registration (and therefore, regulation) of all optical businesses carrying out restricted functions. It is the view of the GOC that compulsory registration will better protect the public by ensuring a consistent approach to those activities that tend to be within the control of businesses as opposed to individual registrants.

Where we say 'you' in this document, we mean:

- You, the body corporate;
- You, the director of an optical business (whether or not you are a registered optometrist or a registered dispensing optician).

You are accountable to the General Optical Council and responsible for what you do, or do not do. This is the case no matter what direction or guidance you are given by an employee or colleague. This means you must always be able to justify your decisions and actions.

For clarity, 'you' does not refer to someone who is simply an employee of the business and has no decision-making power and/or financial control over the business.

Where we say 'staff' in this document, we mean anyone working within the context of the business in any of the following capacities:

- Optometrists and dispensing opticians including independent prescribers (IPs), contact lens opticians (CLOs) and locums;
- Student optometrists and student dispensing opticians;
- Optical assistants or similar titles performing the duties of an optical assistant;
- Any other staff in public-facing roles, for example, reception staff.

Use of the term 'registered staff' refers to those individuals registered with the General Optical Council as either optometrists, dispensing opticians, student optometrists or student dispensing opticians.

It is illegal for optometrists, dispensing opticians, student optometrists and student dispensing opticians to practise in the UK without registering with the General Optical Council.

We recommend that those which are not registered as optical businesses with the General Optical Council follow these standards to ensure they are providing a good service to their patients.

The role of the optical business

As a healthcare provider, your business has a responsibility to ensure the care and safety of patients and the public and to uphold professional standards.

As healthcare professionals, optometrists, dispensing opticians and optical students who work within the context of your business also have a responsibility to ensure the care and safety of their patients and the public, and to uphold their own professional standards. These responsibilities are set out in the *Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians*, and *Standards for Optical Students*, which are complementary documents to this one and should be read in parallel. The business has a part to play in facilitating professionals' abilities to meet their own professional standards when they are working within the context of that business. Both individuals and businesses need to work together to meet their respective standards in order to ensure the care and safety of patients and the public.

Your business and your staff may also have other requirements to adhere to if you or they provide NHS services and, if this is the case, you should ensure that they can be met.

If your business is involved in the delivery of the education pathway, such as providing supervised clinical placements to optical students, this is an important responsibility and you should work closely with education providers to ensure obligations are met.

When there are concerns

If someone raises concerns about your fitness to carry on business, we will refer to these standards when deciding if we need to take any action. You will need to demonstrate that your decision-making was informed by these standards and that you have acted in the best interests of your patients and the public.

Making the care of your patients your first and overriding concern

The care, well-being and safety of patients must always be your first concern. This principle is at the very heart of the healthcare professions. Even if some members of staff do not have direct contact

with patients, their decisions, behaviour and/or working environment can still affect patient care and safety. The standards have been drafted with this principle in mind.

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The standards

The standards are separated into three key areas: your patients, your culture and governance, and your staff.

As a registered optical business you must ensure that:

1. Your patients:
 - 1.1. Are treated in a suitable environment with appropriate equipment;
 - 1.2. Can expect to be safe in your care;
 - 1.3. Are in receipt of clear and effective communications;
 - 1.4. Can give informed consent.

2. Your culture and governance:
 - 2.1. Are open and transparent;
 - 2.2. Ensure compliance with relevant regulations;
 - 2.3. Are subject to clinical governance;
 - 2.4. Respect confidentiality.

3. Your staff:
 - 3.1. Are able to exercise their professional judgment;
 - 3.2. Are suitably trained, qualified and registered;
 - 3.3. Are appropriately supervised;
 - 3.4. Collaborate with others, where appropriate.

1. Your patients

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1.1 Patient care is delivered in a suitable environment

Why is this Standard necessary?

It is crucial that the environment in which patients receive treatment and care is suitable and fit for purpose, so that patients are protected and that accurate information can be obtained about a patient's eye health. This applies no matter where care is being delivered.

To achieve this:

- 1.1.1 Ensure that you have public liability insurance that covers every environment in which your business operates;
- 1.1.2 Ensure that your staff have appropriate professional indemnity insurance to cover their activities where this is necessary, and take reasonable steps to check that this is in place;
- 1.1.3 Maintain a good standard of hygiene and repair in any of your premises from which care is provided, and ensure that any equipment used is also hygienic and in good condition;
- 1.1.4 Obtain equipment, medications and medical devices from reputable sources;
- 1.1.5 Ensure that staff utilising equipment, medications and medical devices have undergone appropriate training in their use;
- 1.1.6 Where care is provided in a domiciliary or other community setting, make it clear to staff that they should only deliver care if they consider the environment to be safe in which to do so;
- 1.1.7 Ensure that the facilities allow sufficient and appropriate space for a carer, chaperone or translator to be present, if required;
- 1.1.8 Provide appropriate disposal facilities for controlled, clinical and offensive waste;
- 1.1.9 Require and enforce infection prevention protocols appropriate for your practice and ensure that all staff are in a position to follow them;
- 1.1.10 Ensure that relevant staff are briefed and trained on what to do if an emergency situation arises;
- 1.1.11 Ensure that unauthorised access to equipment and restricted areas of the premises is prevented;

1.1.12 Put matters right where patients are, or may be, put at risk due to the condition of equipment or premises.

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1.2 Patients can expect to be safe in your care

Why is this Standard necessary?

Promoting patient safety is at the heart of all healthcare. A patient should be able to trust their healthcare professional to prioritise their safety so that they can receive the best possible care. Optical businesses must not inhibit the healthcare professionals they employ from meeting their own professional standards.

To achieve this:

- 1.2.1 Encourage staff to be alert to signs of abuse and denial of rights, and ensure that all relevant staff have undertaken appropriate safeguarding training;
- 1.2.2 Promptly address concerns about colleagues, businesses or other organisations if patient or public safety might be at risk. These concerns may be identified by you or your staff. Where staff have raised concerns, this is sometimes referred to as whistleblowing and certain aspects are protected by law. Further guidance can be sought from the GOC policy on whistleblowing;
- 1.2.3 Where concerns affecting patient or public safety cannot be or are not addressed, you are expected to escalate them, or report them to an appropriate authority and encourage others to do the same.
- 1.2.4 Safeguard patients against abuse by ensuring that relevant staff have up-to-date Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks in place;
- 1.2.5 Have a process for staff to report any safeguarding concerns they have and encourage them to do so;
- 1.2.6 Be prepared to restrict trading in areas of concern if continuing to carry on business may damage the reputation of the profession;

1.3 Communication is clear and effective

Why is this Standard necessary?

Clear communication with patients is vital to be able to provide suitable care to them and ensure that they are involved in making decisions about their own healthcare. It is also important that they know what they can expect from their optical care and have a realistic understanding of what can be provided so that their expectations can be managed.

To achieve this:

- 1.3.1 Promote awareness and understanding of the *Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians, Standards for Optical Students and Standards for Optical Businesses* to patients;
- 1.3.2 Make information available to patients in a way they understand, taking into consideration individual needs and requirements;
- 1.3.3 Ensure that commercial pressures do not inhibit staff from allowing patients the time they need to process information given and the opportunity to change their mind before care is provided;
- 1.3.4 Make clear information available regarding any change to existing products or appliances supplied, to ensure that patients have the right to decide about their own care;
- 1.3.5 Support your staff to communicate effectively with a variety of persons, including patients, carers, professional colleagues and others;
- 1.3.6 Support your staff, where appropriate, to provide patients or carers with all the information they need to be able to safely use, administer or look after any optical devices, drugs or other equipment that they have been prescribed or directed to use in order to manage their eye conditions;
- 1.3.7 Require your staff to communicate sensitive information with care and compassion.

1.4 Patients can give informed consent to treatment

Why is this Standard necessary?

It is a fundamental legal and ethical principle that informed consent must be obtained at the point of care and throughout treatment. Consent reflects the right of patients to determine what happens to their own bodies and make choices when purchasing optical appliances. 'Informed' means that the patient has had an explanation of what the healthcare professional is going to do and that the patient is aware of any risks and options applicable to them. The GOC has further guidance on consent which can be found on our website.¹ Without the support of the business where they work, individual healthcare professionals cannot be in a position to seek and obtain informed consent from patients.

To achieve this:

- 1.4.1. Make information available to staff regarding the differences in the provision of consent in children, young people and vulnerable adults, and any legislation affecting the provision of consent in the nation of the UK in which they work;
- 1.4.2. Support staff in making an assessment of patient capacity where they are unsure, and provide a mechanism for recording any advice they receive on making such an assessment;
- 1.4.3. Make staff aware that consent is an ongoing process throughout the provision of care and enable them to seek this from patients;
- 1.4.4. Do not impose sales targets that have an adverse effect on patient care;
- 1.4.5. Implement a practice protocol for documenting where patients have refused or withdrawn consent.

¹ <https://www.optical.org/en/Standards/consent-guidance/index.cfm>

2. Your culture and governance

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2.1 Your business practices are open and transparent

Why is this Standard necessary?

The Francis Inquiry¹ identified a need for openness and transparency within healthcare. In order to be able to promote the public's trust in you as a business and in the optical professions, you need to ensure that the way your business is run is transparent and that staff are able to be candid.

To achieve this:

- 2.1.1 Foster a culture of candour within the business and have a good knowledge of any contractual or statutory duties of candour that are applicable to your business, as well as the duty on your registered staff under the *Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians* and *Standards for Optical Students*;
- 2.1.2 Ensure that all public-facing staff are clearly identifiable and have roles appropriately assigned, with clear lines of accountability;
- 2.1.3 Establish a clear complaints protocol and make patients aware of their channels of complaint. These include the business, the GOC, the Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS) and the NHS, where relevant;
- 2.1.4 Train staff to have an awareness of complaints policies and protocols, and any other internal protocols directly impacting on patients;
- 2.1.5 Where a patient makes a complaint, ensure that this does not impact on their care. This might require a patient to be referred to another practitioner or practice;
- 2.1.6 Provide a clinical governance structure which allows staff to review and reflect on their practice and identify and share any improvements;
- 2.1.7 Encourage staff to declare any conflicts of interest, where they arise, and withdraw themselves from such conflicts. The joint regulatory conflicts of interest statement² sets out what is expected;
- 2.1.8 Provide clear information that can be given to patients about costs of professional services

¹ <http://www.midstaffpublicinquiry.com/report>

- 2.1.9 Have a clear protocol for staff to follow when something goes wrong with a patient's treatment or care, which includes offering an apology to the patient and outlining what will be done to prevent recurrence;
- 2.1.10 Co-operate fully with any General Optical Council investigation in relation to your practice or your staff. Do not prevent your staff from co-operating with the regulator when this is necessary.

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2.2 You ensure compliance with relevant regulations

Why is this Standard necessary?

In addition to your responsibilities to the GOC, as a business you have a duty to ensure you are compliant with all regulations affecting the running of your business. Failure to comply puts at stake the reputation of your business and ability to continue operating.

To achieve this:

- 2.2.1 Advertise only in ways that are not misleading, confusing or unlawful;
- 2.2.2 Act on any instruction from a statutory authority requiring measures to be implemented to safeguard the welfare of patients and staff;
- 2.2.3 Ensure that all data is obtained, processed, stored and destroyed in a manner compliant with the law;
- 2.2.4 Ensure that those individuals or organisations to which you refer patients have the necessary qualifications and registration so that patient care is not compromised;
- 2.2.5 Promote equality, value diversity and be inclusive in all dealings with staff, patients and others and do not discriminate on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief;
- 2.2.6 Provide staff with clear information about their roles and responsibilities in relation to relevant legislation.

2.3 You have a system of clinical governance in place

Why is this Standard necessary?

Clinical governance is a systematic approach to maintaining and improving the quality of patient care within healthcare organisations. As a business, you are a provider of a healthcare service and therefore have a responsibility to ensure that the care you provide to patients is of good quality and continuously improving.

To achieve this:

- 2.3.1. Encourage staff to discuss difficult cases or significant events in practice and learn from each other. A mechanism for this might be peer review;
- 2.3.2. Learn from mistakes made by your organisation and staff and, where it is possible to do so, put mechanisms in place to prevent recurrence;
- 2.3.3. Audit patient records on a regular basis to identify themes and issues. Address any concerns arising to ensure consistency and quality of patient care;
- 2.3.4. Encourage staff to reflect on their practice and the care that they deliver;
- 2.3.5. Provide mechanisms to enable staff to raise concerns about risks to patients and the public;
- 2.3.6. Take appropriate steps to protect patients, the public and your employees if there is evidence to show that a staff member may not be fit to practise. This also applies to students who are unfit to train;
- 2.3.7. When introducing emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and new systems of working such as telemedicine, take care to ensure that they do not compromise patient care, and that professional standards continue to be met;
- 2.3.8. Take action to put matters right if patient safety is affected by inadequate policies, processes or systems.

2.4 Confidentiality is respected

Why is this Standard necessary?

Respecting confidentiality is a fundamental tenet of healthcare; a patient trusts their healthcare professional and reasonably expects that information to be kept private and not disclosed to others unnecessarily or unlawfully. This duty also applies to information you hold about your staff as an employer. Your role as an optical business is to provide an environment which facilitates the respecting of confidentiality, whilst ensuring that appropriate disclosures can be made where there is a public interest in so doing.

To achieve this:

- 2.4.1. Provide a system for the maintenance of patient records that is secure and accessible only to those who need to see it;
- 2.4.2. Ensure that a private environment is available for patient care when necessary;
- 2.4.3. Store information about staff and recruitment securely and confidentially;
- 2.4.4. Take steps to safeguard premises, and/or areas within premises, from unauthorised access;
- 2.4.5. Update IT systems appropriately to maintain security;
- 2.4.6. Have a protocol for staff to follow so that breaches of confidentiality in the public interest are thoroughly documented.

3. Your staff

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3.1 Your staff are able to freely exercise their professional judgement

Why is this Standard necessary?

It is important for staff to be able to exercise their professional judgement in fulfilling their duties to patients, and to meet the expectations of their professional regulator. This relies on staff being empowered to take into consideration what is best for patients and doing so with their interests and circumstances in mind. To do so freely means without being subject to unreasonable external influence or pressure.

To achieve this:

- 3.1.1 Support staff in public-facing roles to have the confidence to make decisions appropriate to their role;
- 3.1.2 Make sure that commercial pressures do not inhibit the exercise of professional judgement and compromise patient safety;
- 3.1.3 Allow staff sufficient time to accommodate patients' individual needs within the provision of care where justified;
- 3.1.4 Have clear channels of internal communication so that staff can discuss making difficult decisions if they need to, and know with whom they can do this;
- 3.1.5 When introducing new products or changing current products, ensure that they are clinically justified, and staff have the ability to apply professional judgement when deciding if the product is right for individual patients;
- 3.1.6 Encourage staff to undertake learning and development in professional decision-making.

3.2 Staff are suitably trained, qualified and registered

Why is this Standard necessary?

It is a legal requirement that those undertaking restricted functions³ are appropriately registered with the GOC. In addition, staff undertaking other roles in the optical business need to have suitable levels of training so as not to have an adverse impact on patient safety or trust. It is therefore crucial from both healthcare and commercial perspectives that the business takes a proactive role in ensuring its staff are suitably trained, qualified and registered. An individual's learning needs to be lifelong so that they can keep up-to-date with changes in outlook, technology and scope of their profession, and ensure that they remain fit to practise. It is important therefore that the business environment is one in which staff feel able to learn and grow.

To achieve this:

- 3.2.1. Require as a condition of employment that those employed as optometrists and dispensing opticians (and student optometrists and student dispensing opticians) have up-to-date registration with the GOC, and take reasonable steps to ensure that this is the case;
- 3.2.2. Support staff to develop their communication skills and to treat patients with care and compassion;
- 3.2.3. Prepare new staff adequately to understand how patient care is delivered in your specific business setting;
- 3.2.4. Require staff to only work within the limits of their individual competence with regard to patient care and take appropriate action where they do not;
- 3.2.5. Provide an appropriate system for the monitoring of staff objectives and training needs;
- 3.2.6. Support GOC registrants to meet their professional requirements, including *Standards of Practice* and continuing education and training (CET) requirements;

³ 'Restricted functions' are those under Part IV of the Opticians Act 1989 – testing of sight, fitting of contact lenses and sale & supply of optical appliances – which can only legally be undertaken by medical doctors or registered optometrists, registered opticians and under the supervision of a registered optician respectively.

3.3 Staff are adequately supervised

Why is this Standard necessary?

Optical businesses have a responsibility to ensure that staff are adequately supervised, where appropriate, and a key role to play in the formal supervision of pre-registration students as part of the education pathway. It is important to make sure that all staff – regulated or not – have access to the supervision and support they need to provide good patient care. The standards for supervision and delegation arrangements are set out in Standard 9 of the *Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians*. The GOC supervision policy for pre-registration students is set out in the GOC Quality Assurance handbooks⁴.

To achieve this:

- 3.3.1 Ensure that only staff with sufficient levels of qualification and experience act as supervisors, and require them to be on the premises, in a position to oversee the work undertaken and ready to intervene if necessary to protect patients;
- 3.3.2 Encourage staff to record details of any supervision undertaken in the patient record;
- 3.3.3 Where systems are in place to delegate clinical tasks, make clear to all staff members involved that a registrant retains overall clinical responsibility for the patient;
- 3.3.4 Monitor progress of new staff;
- 3.3.5 Have appropriate systems in place to address and manage poor performance;
- 3.3.6 Provide students with sufficient information to know who to contact if they have an issue with any aspect of their supervision;
- 3.3.7 Provide for pre-registration students to have protected time to study.

⁴ <https://www.optical.org/download.cfm?docid=EDE14558-DC43-43FB-8BF6F12C38E632DC>

3.4 Staff collaborate with others, where appropriate

Why is this Standard necessary?

Some patients may need external referral to other healthcare professionals such as ophthalmologists to manage their health. Staff working within an optical business should understand the system of referral available and be in a position to collaborate with other healthcare professionals to ensure patient safety. This cannot be done without the full support of the business.

To achieve this:

- 3.4.1 Support staff to only make referrals when appropriate and clinically justified;
- 3.4.2 Facilitate the sharing of appropriate and relevant information in a timely manner;
- 3.4.3 Make sure that further information can be requested from the patient, their carer(s) or any other healthcare professional as necessary;
- 3.4.4 Encourage respectful communications with professional colleagues;
- 3.4.5 Require staff to keep patient records that are clear, legible, contemporaneous and sufficiently detailed to be accessible to another healthcare professional.

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