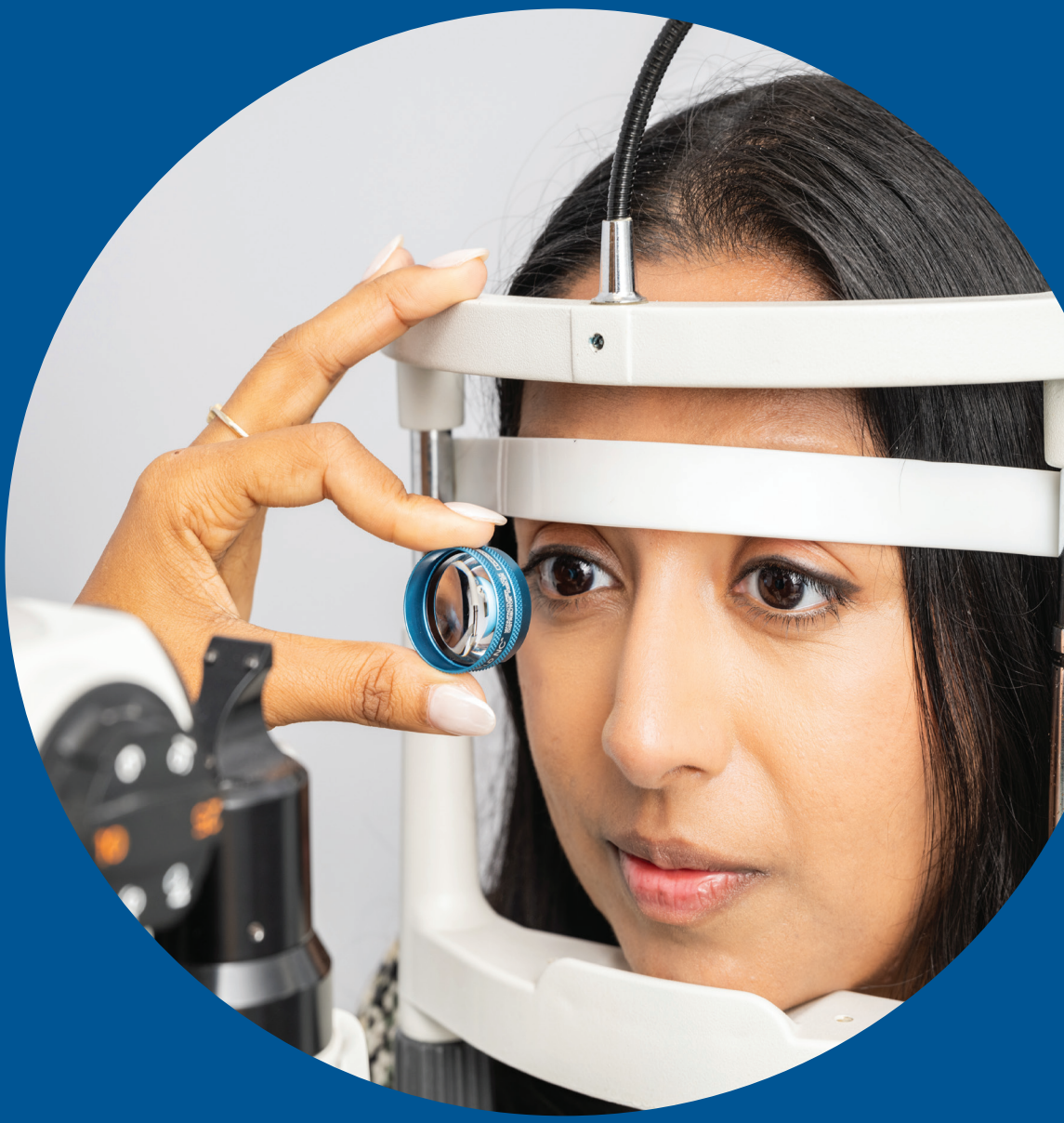
General Optical Council

UK Optical Education

GOC Approved Qualifications 2024



Contents

1. Overview 3
The Sector at a glance 3
2. Progress implementing the GOC's Education and Training Requirements 7
3. Key themes 11
Student applications and recruitment 11
Student progression and attainment 13
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 13
Student satisfaction and welfare 14
Placements and supervision 15
Funding 16
Perceptions of graduates 17
Innovation and good practice 18
Risk reporting 18
4. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) 20
Widening Participation 21
EDI data 21
5. Qualification Findings 27
Optometry (OP) 27
Independent Prescribing (IP) 31
Dispensing Optics 33
Contact Lens Opticians (CLO) 37
GOC Awarding Body Approved Qualifications offered by the College of Optometrists (Optometry and Independent Prescribing) 39
GOC Awarding Body Approved Qualifications offered by the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (Dispensing and Contact Lens Opticians) 41
Annex 1: Background information 43
Annex 2: Data tables 47
Annex 3 – National Student Survey categories 50

1. Overview

The Sector at a glance

GOC approved and provisionally approved qualifications:

Qualification type	Number of qualifications
Optometry (OP)	15
Independent prescribing (IP)	6
Dispensing Optics (DO)	9
Contact Lens Optician (CLO)	3
Approved qualifications offered by professional associations	4

Student Numbers

Total students	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
OP*	3,154	3,270	3,296	3,454
IP	530	435	521	N/A**
DO	748	763	783	969
CLO	58	66	59	67

*excludes those on College of Optometrist's Scheme for Registration due to different term period.
**The total number of IP students for 2023/24 is not available and will be disclosed in next year's AMR Sector Report.

Admissions to Optometry qualifications increased by 9% in 2023/24 whilst Dispensing Optics qualifications fell by 8%.

Admissions to year 1	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24***
Optometry	1,109	1,056	1,039	1,141
Dispensing Optics	135	319	346	319

***see footnote 1

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 and Learning	90.0%	90.1%	83.8%
Learning Outcomes	87.3%	87.1%	80.9%
Assessment and Feedback	80.1%	85.5%	76.0%
Academic Support	85.8%	92.8%	77.0%
Organisation and Management	80.6%	69.7%	62.3%
Learning Resources	84.8%	88.6%	86.4%
Student Voice	75.2%	87.4%	69.3%
Student Union	72.2%	75.7%	73.4%

Average academic offer

UCAS Points	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
OP	134	136	134	136
DO	36	54	47	61.3

Average percentage of students exiting the qualification

Students exiting without graduating	2021/22			2022/23		
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Optometry	3.8%	2.1%	0.7%	8.2%	4.4%	1.6%
Dispensing Optics	6.7%	8.3%	3.5%	17.9%	4.4%	1.4%

Business Perceptions* of newly qualified optical professionals

*Indicated in the GOC Business Registrant Survey 2024

Perception at the point of starting at the business	Optometrists	Dispensing Opticians
They could/can perform most tasks within their scope of practice	72%	86%
They were/are equipped for safe clinical practice	69%	75%

1.1 This year's GOC Approved Qualifications Report provides an analysis of education and training of optical students and trainees using data from a range of sources, including information submitted by providers of GOC approved qualifications as well as external research.

1.2 The report includes a commentary on sector developments in the 2022/23 academic year, which was a period of significant change following the introduction of new education and training requirements (ETR) for pre-registration qualifications we approve in optometry and dispensing optics, and post-registration qualifications in independent prescribing (for optometrists) and for contact lens opticians (for dispensing opticians).

1.3 In summary the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the sector include:

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
• Steady growth in admissions to optometry qualifications and a significant growth in independent prescribing admissions. • Entry grades for optometry are competitive, with median offers equating to AAB at A-Level. • Student satisfaction scores evidenced in the National Student Survey were above Subjects Allied to Medicine in most cases. • Employer perceptions of new graduates is generally strong. • Sector collaboration in delivering the ETR has been strong, and most Year 1 students are now studying qualifications which meet the ETR. • The sector has been well supported by SPOKE in implementing the ETR.	• Year 1 optometry progression has declined over a two-year period. • Considerable variance in admissions offers for dispensing optics qualifications; average academic offer is low - DDE at A-Level. • High levels of student stress and a need for vigilance to reduce incidents of bullying, harassment, abuse and discrimination, as evidenced in the GOC's 2024 registrant survey. • Barriers for optometrists to progress onto IP qualifications of time, cost and lack of employer support, as well as a lack of eligible supervisors.
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Government keen to deliver more outpatient eye care in the high street to ease pressure on NHS hospital eye-care may create higher demand for places. • Degree apprenticeships could increase student numbers and widen participation. • New models for delivering clinical learning and experience are emerging,	• Sustainability and geographic distribution of GOC-approved qualifications, most particularly for optometry, given higher education funding crisis. • Sufficiency of clinical placements for students remains a risk. • Uncertainty as to how long the College of Optometrist's Scheme for Registration will remain in place for

with sector partnerships such as CLiP and through provider-led employer partnerships • Service redesign may lead to increased demand for independent prescribers and conversion course places for dispensing opticians wishing to become optometrists. • GOC plans to evaluate the ETR with an impact study due to commence in 2026.	optometrists graduating from pre-ETR qualifications. • Ongoing COVID legacy issues in terms of student support and supply of placements. • Increase in undergraduate medical places could reduce pool of potential new optometry students.

2. Progress implementing the GOC's Education and Training Requirements

2.1 The new education and training requirements (ETR) for optometry and dispensing optics were introduced in January 2021 and for specialist post-registration qualifications in February 2022. The ETR replaced the Quality Assurance Handbooks for optometry (2015) and Ophthalmic Dispensing (2011), Therapeutic Prescribing' (July 2008) and Contact Lens Opticians (2007). Transition to the new requirements has been at a good pace, with most providers transitioning to the ETR from September 2023. By September 2024, all except three GOC approved qualifications across optometry and dispensing optics had adapted to the ETR.

2.2 The changes we made ensured that the qualifications we approve are fit for purpose, meet patient and service-user needs and ensure optical professionals have the expected level of knowledge, skills and behaviours and the confidence and capability to keep pace with changes to future roles, scopes of practice and service redesign across all four nations of the UK. An outcomes-based approach to specifying the expectations of a day-one registrant and which supported their continued development after registration, moved away from our previous numerical and competency-based method for setting requirements for GOC qualification approval.

2.3 The new requirements emphasised the development of students' professional capability, including a greater focus on key skills such as professional judgement, patient-centred communication, management of risk, and diagnostic, consultation and clinical practice skills and a greater emphasis on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). The ETR introduced a minimum Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF) level (or equivalent) for qualifications we approve and an integrated approach to curriculum design and assessment, including minimum levels of patient-facing learning and experience of working with patients which must increase in volume and complexity as a student or trainee progresses through a qualification.

Providers' progress to transition to the ETR

2.4 The table below describes the progress of providers of GOC approval qualifications in adapting their existing qualifications, or in designing new qualifications to meet the ETR.

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 received	TBC
	Cardiff University	Adapted	Sept-23
	City St George's, University of London	Adapted	Sept-23
	University of Central 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	In progress	TBC
	University of the West of England, Bristol	Adapted	Sept 24
	Ulster University	Adapted	Sept 23
Dispensing Optics	ABDO	Adapted	Sept-23
	ABDO - Apprenticeship	Permission to recruit	Sept-24
	Anglia Ruskin University	Adapted	Sept-23
	University of Central Lancashire	Adapted	Sept-23
	Glasgow Caledonian University	Not yet received	Sept-25
Independent Prescribing	Aston University	Adapted	Oct-23
	Cardiff University	Adapted	Sept-24
	City, University of London	Not yet received	TBC
	Glasgow Caledonian University	Adapted	Jan-26
	University of Hertfordshire	Not yet received	TBC
	Ulster University	Not yet received	Sept 25
Contact Lens Optics	ABDO	Adapted	Sept-24
	Anglia Ruskin University	Not yet received	TBC

2.5 A comparison between admissions data from 2022/23 and student registration data from 2023/24[1] (the closest comparable data) for all stated qualifications (i.e. those using the ETR and those still using the handbooks) shows a slight average increase of 9% in new entrants for Optometry, whilst for Dispensing Optics there was an 8% decrease in students admitted. It is not possible to ascertain whether the implementation of the ETR can explain these fluctuations.

2.6 A method for delivering professional and clinical learning and experience in integrated ETR qualifications has been established by the College of Optometrists in partnership with providers and employers (the Clinical Learning in Practice (CLiP)) which has been utilised by 80% of Optometry qualifications. CLiP includes features such as support to students in obtaining a placement and the use of a portal/software platform to manage applications and offers for placements. Alternatives to the CLiP model have been developed by individual providers, such as the University of Manchester which includes the integration of patient facing experience throughout the duration of the qualification.

2.7 Comments we received from providers relating to implementation of the ETR focussed on their resourcing of clinical placements in integrated qualifications, including resourcing required for support and quality assurance of placements. One provider commented that an optometry qualification costs more per student to deliver than is funded via student finance because of the requirement to provide more advanced clinical experience. Some providers highlighted aspects of their qualifications which supported the delivery of the ETR, such as maintaining stakeholder relationships with organisations such as hospitals, charities and employers, which in turn helped facilitate placements. Other providers commented that their pre-ETR qualification structure assisted in their transition to the ETR, such as already offering an integrated Masters' qualification.

2.8 To support implementation of the ETR and to facilitate the development of shared resources and knowledge exchange, we continue to fund a sector collaboration called Sector Partnership for Optical Knowledge and Education (SPOKE) which has delivered projects and issued guidance such as indicative guidance to support providers in meeting the Outcomes for Registration, and guidance on supervision, as well as publishing online resources and offering networking activities that providers may draw upon during transition. We also support and chair the Sector Strategic Implementation Steering Group (SSISG), a forum for sector organisations to come together to consider a wide range of issues related to funding, supervision and workforce supply.

[1] Provider admissions data for the next academic year (2023/24) is not available and GOC student registration data for the 2023/24 year 1 cohort is used instead as the closest comparable data. The provider data for 23/24 will be available in next year's report.

2.9 Plans to evaluate the impact of the ETR were approved by GOC Council in 2020. A longitudinal research impact study will 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). A research advisory group chaired by Professor Andy Husband, Head of the School of Pharmacy at Newcastle University has made recommendations in shaping the research brief in advance of selecting a contractor,[2] including that the research will take place for optometry and dispensing optics cohorts (x4) lasting 12 months for each cohort, on a four-nation basis, thereby enabling a comparison of qualifications with and without an integrated IP qualification. The impact study is expected to commence in 2026.

[2] The contractor will most likely be a research-focused organisation selected in accordance with the GOC Contracts and Procurement Policy and Scheme of Delegation for Financial Management.

3. Key themes

3.1 Below we draw out key themes from across the individual chapters using data collected from qualification providers, GOC research and external sources, and provide commentary on strategic implications for the sector.

Student applications and recruitment

3.2 The ETR are designed to ensure optical professionals have the expected level of knowledge, skills and behaviours and the confidence and capability to keep pace with changes to future roles, scopes of practice and service redesign in a rapidly changing landscape across all four nations of the UK. However, a critical factor in enabling the delivery of more routine outpatient care in optical practices, helping to ease pressure on GPs and hospital eye services, will be the supply of a sufficient number of appropriately qualified optical professionals capable and competent to deliver advanced services, as well as their geographical distribution, especially in remote and rural areas of the UK.

3.3 On average optometry (OP) qualifications continued to report strong application figures with an average year 1 cohort size similar to the previous year, with 1141 student admissions[3]. A report published by SPOKE on admissions and recruitment[4] suggests that optometry is often a fallback choice for candidates who have unsuccessfully applied for medicine. The increase in medical places agreed in the NHS Workforce Plan for England[5] may create a risk to sustaining student numbers in optometry if students choose to pursue a medical place instead of an optometry qualification. The SPOKE report includes recommendations around increasing interest in optical careers such as practicing clinicians and educators engaging more at a local level with schools and career fairs.

3.4 Across all OP qualifications 40 international students were admitted (4% of all admissions). It is worthwhile noting that our recent consultation about managing applications for GOC registration from optical professionals who qualified outside the UK does not prevent a non-UK citizen with or without a recognised optical qualification[6] applying to study for a UK GOC approved qualification in either optometry or dispensing optics. Meanwhile, following

[3] See footnote 1
[4] SPOKE Project 3 Report on Admissions and Recruitment for optometry and dispensing optics qualifications, May 2023
[5] NHS Long Term Workforce Plan, June 2023, p18
[6] The GOC will in due course commission an analysis that maps potential equivalent (or nearly equivalent) qualifications in certain overseas countries against the ETR. This will inform recognition of a non-UK optical qualification. The GOC's full response to the public consultation held in 2023 on managing applications for GOC registration from optical professionals who have qualified outside of the UK is available to view here

public consultation, GOC confirmed two alternative routes to registration for applicants who have qualified outside the UK, including the opportunity for providers to handle admissions directly.

3.5 The SPOKE report noted above suggests that universities are in recruitment rather than selection mode based in part on numbers of students recruited through clearing and overall average grade offers. However, our data suggests that initial academic offers for OP qualifications are high, averaging AAB equivalent and only 11% of students were recruited through clearing. Therefore, we are confident that the calibre of optometry students remains strong.

3.6 The number of trainees on independent prescribing (IP) qualifications increased substantially from 435 in 2021/22 to 521 in 2022/2023 (+16.5%). This reflects strong continued demand for IP qualifications as indicated in the GOC's 2024 registrant survey, where 42% of respondents stated they were interested in gaining an IP qualification within the next two years (38% in 2023)[7]. While the increase in trainee numbers is encouraging, if the level of interest in the registrant survey materialised into applications, trainee numbers would be far higher, so it is important to understand the barriers to participation. The registrant survey suggests that time, cost and lack of employer support are the three main barriers to career progression generally. In relation to IP, we understand an insufficient pool of eligible supervisors is a specific barrier and GOC is reviewing how we can help ease supervisor bottlenecks in anticipation of a SPOKE report on this topic.

3.7 Despite falling slightly in 2023/24, dispensing optics (DO) admittances are 58% higher than 2020/21 with 319 students[8] admitted to the GOC register. Over the last decade, register growth for optometry has been 21% compared to just 1% for dispensing optics, so it is good to see a continued robust recovery in numbers since the COVID-19 pandemic. The degree apprenticeship route to qualification is an important development and we look forward to seeing if student numbers increase. In GOC's 2024 registrant survey, 22% of dispensing opticians expressed interest in moving to a career in optometry and a larger proportion of dispensing opticians than optometrists stated they planned to leave the profession, so maintaining a sufficient pool of students is important.

3.8 The number of trainees on contact lens optics (CLO) qualifications has remained stable over the past three years (67 in 2023/24, 59 in 2022/23 and 66 in 2021/22).

[7] General Optical Council "Registrant Workforce and Perceptions Survey 2024" (June 2024), p50
[8] See footnote 1

Student progression and attainment

3.9 The higher education sector continues to be under scrutiny for excessive dropout rates in some courses. In 2023, Nuffield Trust described a 'crisis' in dropout rates in the healthcare professions covering both education and early career years. The research, which excludes the optical professions, notes there are many reasons why students do not complete their course including financial, academic, workload and placement factors.

3.10 While admissions data is encouraging, the annual supply of newly qualified optical professionals is affected by students repeating a year or exiting without qualifying[9]. Year 1 progression rates for the OP qualifications have gradually decreased reporting an average of 81.7% (84.5% in 2021/22; 88.5% in 2020/21) of students progressing to the second year. OP qualifications report an average of 90.2% (91.5% in 2021/22; 95.6% in 2020/21) of final year students completing the course. DO qualifications report an average of 75.6% (73.7% in 2021/22; 79.7% in 2020/21) students progressing to the second year and an average of 83.2% (93.9% in 2021/22; 90.4% in 2020/21) final year students completing the course.

3.11 This year, average attainment rates for stage one OP providers are extremely high with an average of 99.4% of students receiving a good degree (2:2 degree or higher), whilst for DO's the average is 88.2%. Attainment data related to the qualifications offered by the professional associations show that pass rates for OP have increased slightly (+0.8%), and for DO have decreased (-5%), and for IP and CLO have decreased (-13% and -2.7% respectively) since last year.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

3.12 As in all aspects of healthcare regulation there is an increasing focus on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the higher education sector.

3.13 As noted above, a highlight of 2024 is the launch of ABDO's degree apprenticeship with the first cohort of students beginning their studies in September. In optometry, the Trailblazer Group has reconvened, and we hope to see progress on an apprenticeship proposal for our consideration, which may help broaden access to optometry education.

[9] The average rate of students exiting a qualification for year one amounted to 8.2% of optometry students and 17.9% for dispensing optics students. In later cohort years the average rate drops significantly; dispensing optics year 2 is 4.36% and year 3 is 1.37% whilst the percentage for optometry is 4.4% and 1.56% respectively. It is important to note that these are average sector rates with variance across the sector for each year.

3.14 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.

3.15 The PSA's evidence matrix was published after forms for this year's AMR exercise were issued to providers. The GOC will work with qualification providers to improve data it receives in this area as part of the quality assurance and enhancement mechanism (QAEM) which includes thematic reviews for the Standards for Approved Qualifications, sample-based reviews for the Outcomes for Registration, as well as information collected within the annual returns for future years. As part of this work, we will consider the Office for Students (OfS) Equality of Opportunity Risk Register, which provides a set of criteria for exploring a range of risks to equality of opportunity across the higher education sector.[10]

3.16 This year's report contains a standalone chapter on EDI including demographic data and commentary on widening participation initiatives. This reveals some shifts in the composition of the student population over time in both professions with the profile of students being more diverse in terms of sex and race than the overall registrant base. Finally, SPOKE is preparing a report on fitness to train, reasonable adjustments and suspension of studies (in education settings) and the equivalent processes in employment settings.

Student satisfaction and welfare

3.17 National Student Survey (NSS) scores for OP qualifications were higher than the 'Subjects Allied to Medicine' (SATM) for all categories except learning resources and student union. Scores were within 5% of the national average for all categories except being lower for student voice. Scores in all categories were higher than last year with a notable increase in the Assessment and

[10] Equality of Opportunity Risk Register - Office for Students

Feedback category (+15.5%). There was a large gap between the highest and lowest average question score for OP qualifications (94.3% and 68.5% respectively). Few providers reported NSS scores for DO qualifications, but those that did were higher than the SATM for all categories. Scores were within 5% of the national average for all categories except being lower for Organisation and Management. Scores in all categories except Organisation and Management were higher than last year.

3.18 In the GOC's 2024 registrant survey, 8% of student respondents had experienced harassment, abuse, or bullying from tutors, lecturers or supervisors in the last 12 months (7% in 2023). For 35% of student optometrists and 41% of student dispensing opticians the last incident was reported, which is higher than fully qualified registrants. As with fully qualified registrants, 'not trusting that anything would be done or the people I have to report to' was the main reason given for non-reporting.

3.19 Further, 6% of student optometrists had experienced discrimination from tutors, lecturers or supervisors in the last 12 months (8% in 2023). There was a zero return from the student dispensing opticians who participated.

3.20 36% of optometry students reported taking a leave of absence due to stress in the last 12 months compared to 23% for survey respondents overall. The figure for student dispensing opticians was 20%.

Placements and supervision

3.21 Securing sufficient supply of placements, both on current qualifications and to support transition to the ETR has been a key focus of sector discussions. Although much progress has been achieved, notably with the development of new Clinical Learning in Practice (CLiP) placements, work continues across the optical sector to facilitate placements in sufficient numbers and to avoid potential contraction with consequential risks for workforce supply.

3.22 In GOC's 2024 registrant survey, 23% of working optometrist respondents had worked as a supervisor for pre-registration trainee optometrists in the last 12 months. Working as a supervisor was more common amongst those who worked for a multiple (33%) compared with independents (12%). There was variation between nations ranging from 18% in Northern Ireland to 28% in Wales. Respondents who indicated that they sometimes or frequently feel unable to cope with their workload were more likely to work as supervisors.

3.23 In GOC's 2024 business registrant survey a quarter of respondents had arrangements with universities or the College of Optometrists to offer placements, with this being much more prevalent among multiples than independent practices. 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. All benefits were expressed much more strongly by multiples than by independent practices.

3.24 Both SPOKE and FODO – the Association of Eye Care Providers – published guidance on supervision in 2024. The flexibility introduced by the ETR enables less experienced members of the team to contribute to learner oversight and development. Further, GOC is in the process of updating its standards of practice, which will include encourage registrants to support the next generation of professionals as way of demonstrating leadership.

Funding

3.25 The funding of higher education is a devolved matter, and different funding methods exist in each nation of the UK. The sufficiency and sustainability of funding for optical education delivered by regulated Higher Education Institutions (HEI) is a key risk for the sector. It also acts as a barrier for the development of new GOC approved qualifications by either new or existing providers. Outside of Scotland, the majority of funding a HEI receives for optical education comes directly from student tuition fees (in England, £9250 per year). It is estimated that per-student funding for teaching home undergraduate students has now fallen by 18% in real terms since 2012/13 but is still slightly higher than in 2011/12.[11] In England, both optometry and dispensing optics, along with other high-cost humanity and science-based subjects, are in OfS price band B, which attracts an additional high-cost subject funding allocation of about £895 per student, per year, (as explained here, in this OfS explanatory document and its Recurrent Strategic Priorities Grant document). Different arrangements exist in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

3.26 In England, in May 2024 the OfS published analysis based on financial data from universities and colleges suggesting that the higher education sector is facing considerable financial pressure.[12] The OfS recently closed a much-anticipated consultation seeking views about how it could develop its funding approach, to which we responded. In addition, in March 2024, following a meeting with OfS officials, sector bodies, including GOC, sent a joint letter to OfS making the case for additional funding. The optometry sector responded with immense concern when the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England announced a cut in real terms to the NHS sight test fee in England with no increase in the pre-registration training grant for the second

[11] Higher education finances: how have they fared, and what options will an incoming government have? | Institute for Fiscal Studies (ifs.org.uk)
[12] Navigating financial challenges in higher education - Office for Students

year running[13] from April this year. This funding decision did not take into account the increased costs resulting from changes to the GOC's ETR.

3.27 Meanwhile, the devolved administration in Scotland announced a 6% increase in GOS[14] funding and enhanced community eye care services as well as to the pre-registration training grant from April this year.[15] In Wales following the introduction of new ophthalmic services regulations in October 2023, the NHS sight fee increased with no change to the pre-registration training grant[16], and for Northern Ireland the sight test fee is slightly less than England[17].

3.28 Providers reported a range of resourcing and investment decisions in their returns which for some involved investing in new clinical facilities and/or equipment including on-campus eye clinics, specialist clinics, and use of simulations to enable students to enhance their patient-facing skills in practice. As reported in the optical press, there appear no imminent threats of course closures or redundancies, in contrast to the picture in the higher education sector more widely.[18]

Perceptions of graduates

3.29 Perceptions of newly qualified optical professionals meeting each of the seven categories of the ETR were measured as part of the GOC's Business Registrant Survey. There is of course a number of years to go before cohorts graduate under the new requirements, but the general perception about how well newly qualified professionals are performing in each of the seven outcome categories of the ETR, is instructive.

3.30 For optometry, the top outcome category which businesses perceived as met was Ethics and Standards on 78%, whilst for dispensing optics the top category was Person-Centred Care on 95%. Clinical Practice came just behind for both professions. In contrast, Leadership and Management was by far the weakest outcome category deemed as met for both professions with optometry on 39% and dispensing optics on 44%.[19]

3.31 Most businesses surveyed agreed that newly qualified optometrists could perform most tasks within their scope of practice at the point of starting at

[13] The NHS sight test fee in England for 2024-25 is £23.53 and the pre-registration supervision grant is £4010. (Source: Optometric Fees Negotiating Committee, 26 March 2024)
[14] General Ophthalmic Services
[15] Optometry Scotland, "GOS Fee Increase", 13 September 2023
[16] The NHS sight fee in Wales is set at £43 for 2023/24 whilst the pre-registration training grant is set at £3837. (Source: Welsh Government, 20 October 2023)
[17] For sight tests performed by optometrists after 1 April 2023 in Northern Ireland the fee is £23.15. (Source: HSC, 30 April 2024)
[18] Financial challenges in the higher education sector (aop.org.uk)
[19] GOC Business Registrant Survey 2024, p32-34

the business (72%) whilst for dispensing opticians the percentage was 86%. Improvements were seen across all the metrics surveyed in both professions when businesses considered the current performance of these employees.

Innovation and good practice

3.32 There is evidence of emerging innovation in implementing the ETR and strong local stakeholder relationships. Providers noted their close links with health care organisations in the community such as hospitals and high street eye care practices, both potential facilitators of placements increasing the range of clinical practice environments for students.

3.33 Following the COVID-19 pandemic, many providers continued to exploit the capabilities of virtual learning environments to enhance the learning experience for students with some qualifications, especially those in independent prescribing (IP), using hybrid delivery models.

3.34 In Scotland, IP is being incorporated into the optometry qualification in a 5-year Master's programme supported by NHS Education for Scotland.[20] Providers have also reported that the introduction of new education and training requirements has provided an opportunity to reappraise their qualifications. With the ETR reforms bedding down, we have seen interest among both current and new providers in developing new qualifications and we hope these will come to fruition.

3.35 Other examples of innovation or good practice submitted, include:

- initiatives to enhance students' professionalism;
- support for students concerning information provided early on in the qualification (such as fitness to practice declarations) to alleviate anxiety for those with a mental health condition or disability;
- harnessing developments in technology to support blended learning qualification delivery;
- taking account of updated evidence and guidance;
- regular review of syllabus content;
- training for clinical supervisors and mentors; and
- feedback gathering from a range of stakeholders about the qualification, including input to support the delivery of the qualification (such as that from external examiners).

Risk reporting

3.36 All qualifications submitted risk analyses. As reported last year, the increased use of online delivery of qualifications including the use of hybrid and entirely

[20] "Optometry education in Scotland and independent prescribing", Optometry Today, 22 May 2024

online delivery models whilst bringing significant benefits in terms of access, has increased reliance on digital infrastructure systems which could be vulnerable to a systems failure affecting delivery of the qualification.

3.37 A number of providers were concerned about future changes to the delivery of optical education, notably the arrival of apprenticeships which was noted could lead to a demographic shift of optical trainees and potentially fewer typical university age applicants. Competition from local providers was another concern potentially reducing the number of applicants and under recruitment of staff.

3.38 The supply of clinical placements to students was raised along with questions about their cost, maintenance and logistical arrangements. The fully integrated ETR was cited as requiring additional teaching staff to support placements and administrative support to draw up contracts with placement suppliers.

3.39 Ongoing consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are still being reported by some providers. These include the risk that some students may require significant support to meet the requirements of higher education because of alternative learning and assessment methods employed by schools and colleges during the pandemic. Meanwhile, the supply of some placements is reported as still being affected by restrictions imposed during the pandemic.

4. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

4.1 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. Many providers provided information about supporting students with a declared disability and promoting an inclusive learning environment.

4.2 Like the previous year, most OP students were Asian, female, and aged 20 and under. Most DO students were Asian females, and aged 20 to 24, with many DO qualifications recruiting more mature students than OP qualifications. Longer-term trends suggest that over the past four years, for both OP and DO qualifications, there has been an increase in the percentage[21] of female students and students with a known disability. For DO students there has been a slight decrease in the percentage of white students and slight increase in the percentage of Asian students. For OP students there has been a slight increase in the percentage of students aged 20 and under. Overall trends remain steady.

4.3 IP and CLO qualifications recruit students who are already qualified practitioners. Although most IP and CLO students were over the age of 30, like the past year, roughly 30% were within the 25-29 age bracket. Longer-term trends suggest that over the past four years both IP and CLO qualifications have an increased proportion of trainees aged 21-24 and in future years there will be IP students aged 20 and under studying for combined OP and IP qualifications in Scotland.

4.4 We have compared registrant and trainee figures as an indicator of progression from entry level qualifications in both specialist qualifications. The percentage of black IP trainees and IP registrants are similar (1.2% and 1.1%). The percentage of CLO black trainees is higher than CLO registrants (3.3% and 0.7%). There is a higher percentage of Asian trainees than registrants in both IP (31.0% and 25.3%) and CLO (25.0% and 14.0%). There is a higher percentage of female IP registrants (60.9%) than IP trainees (50.4%) whilst the opposite is true for CLO with 60.5% registrants and 80.2% trainees, respectively.

4.5 The GOC's 2024 Registrant Survey showed that just over half of optometry respondents (55%) agreed that there are opportunities to develop their career at their place of work (by for example pursuing specialist optical qualifications), whilst the percentage was 12% lower for dispensing opticians (43%).

[21] Average (mean) figures across providers are used.

Widening Participation

4.6 Many providers collect widening participation (WP) information which may include a student's ethnicity, gender, age group, academic and socio-economic background, religion, sexual orientation, first generation university student (or not), and refugee status.

4.7 On the whole WP information 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.

4.8 Specific examples of WP activities include: strategies 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 to assist students who need support, support infrastructure (often centralised) to recommend to qualification teams and module leads adjustments for students with disabilities, 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, and course material available in an accessible format for all students.

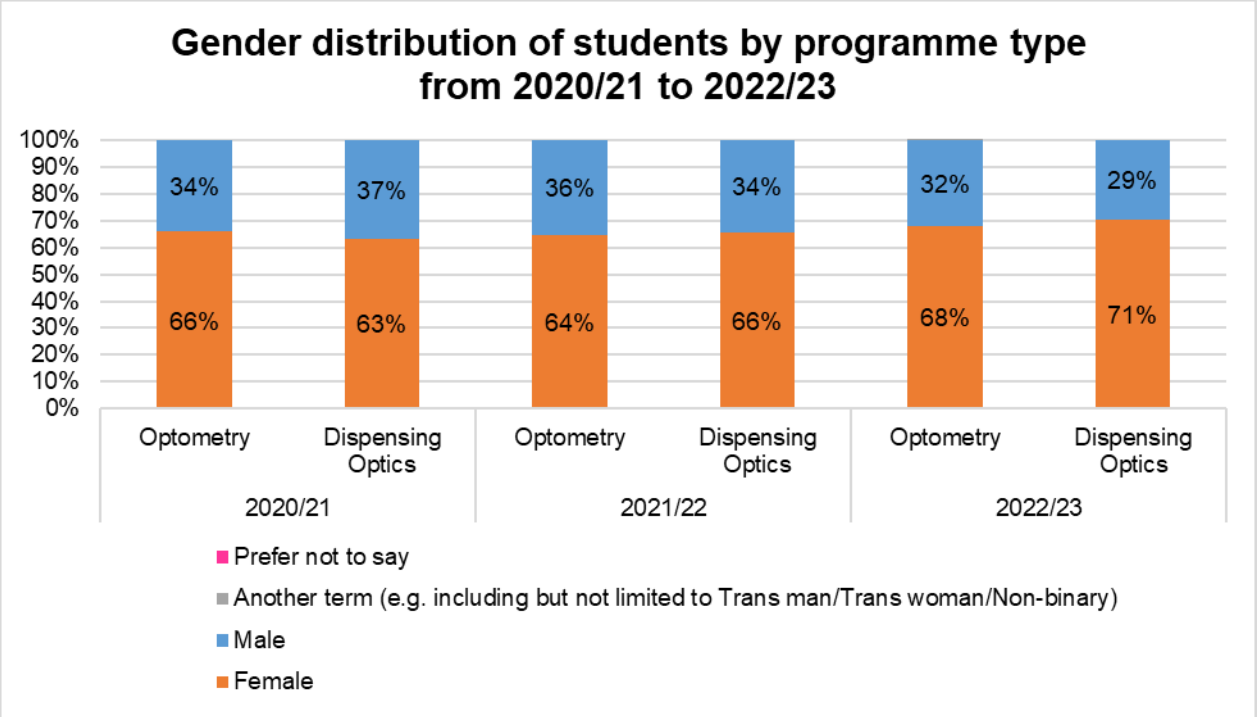
4.9 Reasonable adjustments used by providers for specific individuals include time extensions to coursework, additional time in examinations, supervised rest breaks, separate rooms for examinations to avoid distractions, access to a computer in examinations, advance supply of lecture materials in alternative formats, adjustment to timetables to support students with caring responsibilities and to allow students to attend religious events, adjustable tables and chairs, and individual support during teaching sessions.

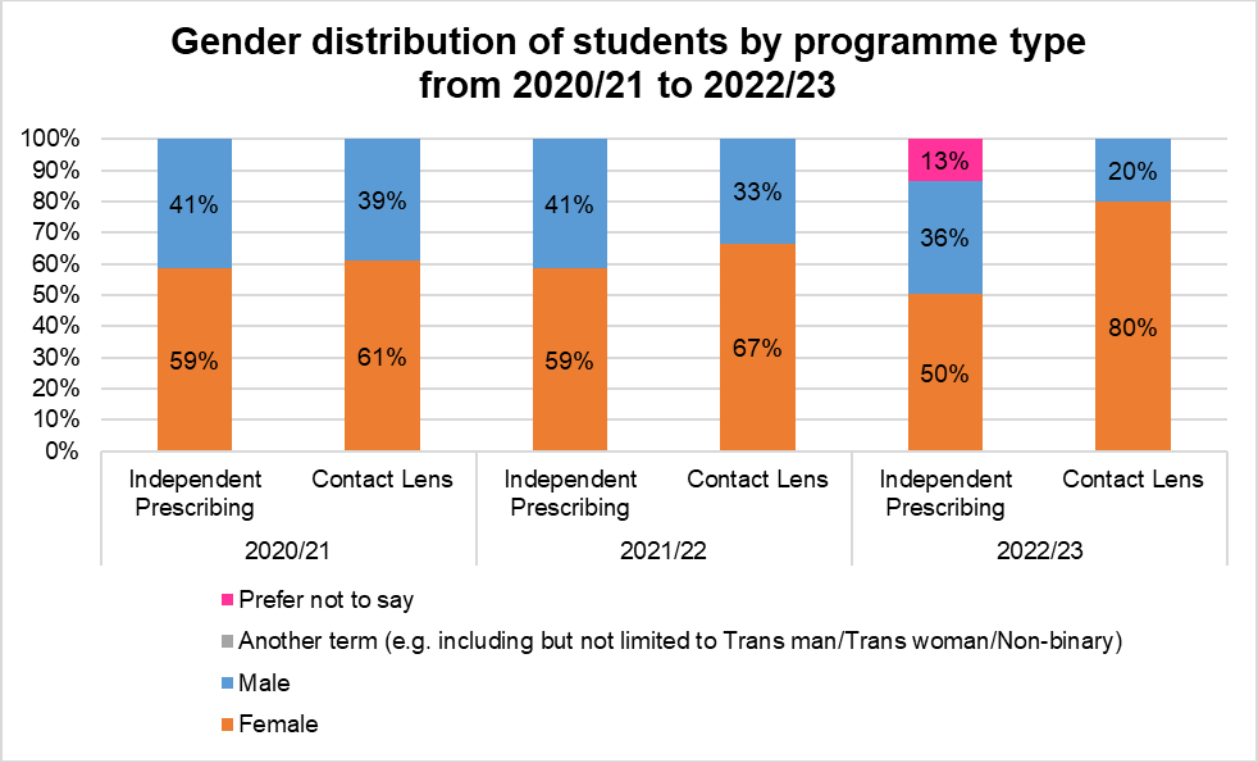
4.10 Sector discussions are currently taking place concerning how all students, regardless of their background can progress towards meeting the outcomes for registration without compromising patient safety. In this respect, issues relating to fitness to train and the consistency of decision making on reasonable adjustments in a clinical setting, are being considered, as well as the risk presented by different conditions and disabilities. A SPOKE report on fitness to train, reasonable adjustments, and suspension of studies is expected to be published later in 2024.

EDI data

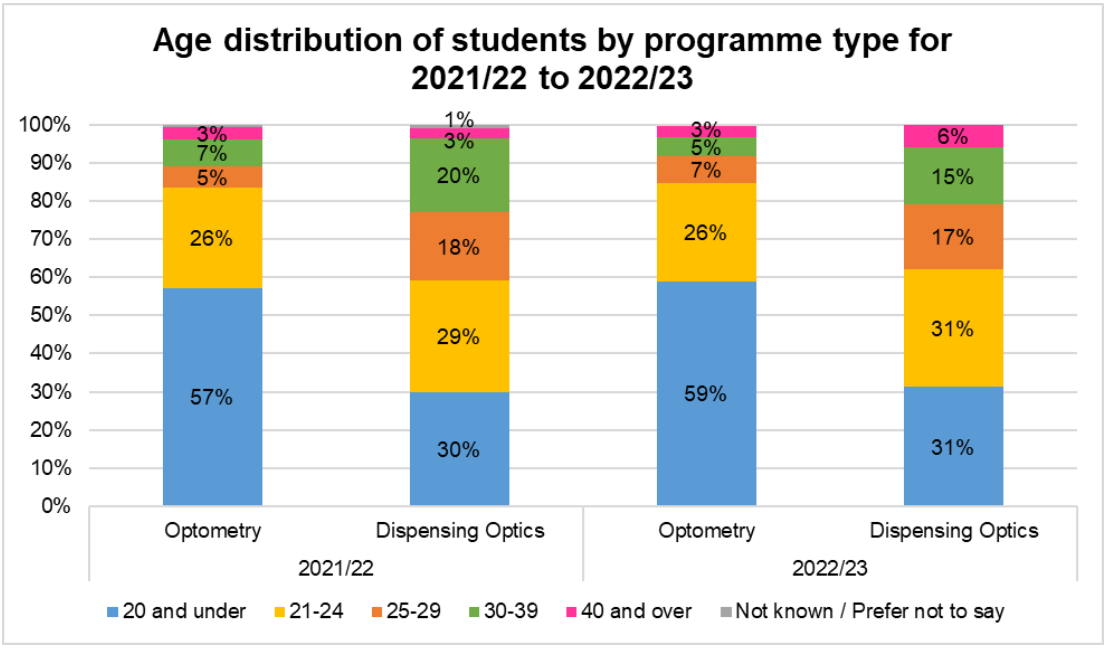
4.11 Data tables can be found in Annex 2.

4.12 **Gender:** As in previous years, all qualifications have more female than male students. Over the last three years the proportion of female dispensing optics students has increased by 8%. There has been an even more pronounced shift in contact lens qualifications with 8 in 10 students now female compared to 6 in 10 three years ago. Since our registrant survey suggests females are more likely to work part-time these changes may have implications for workforce planning.



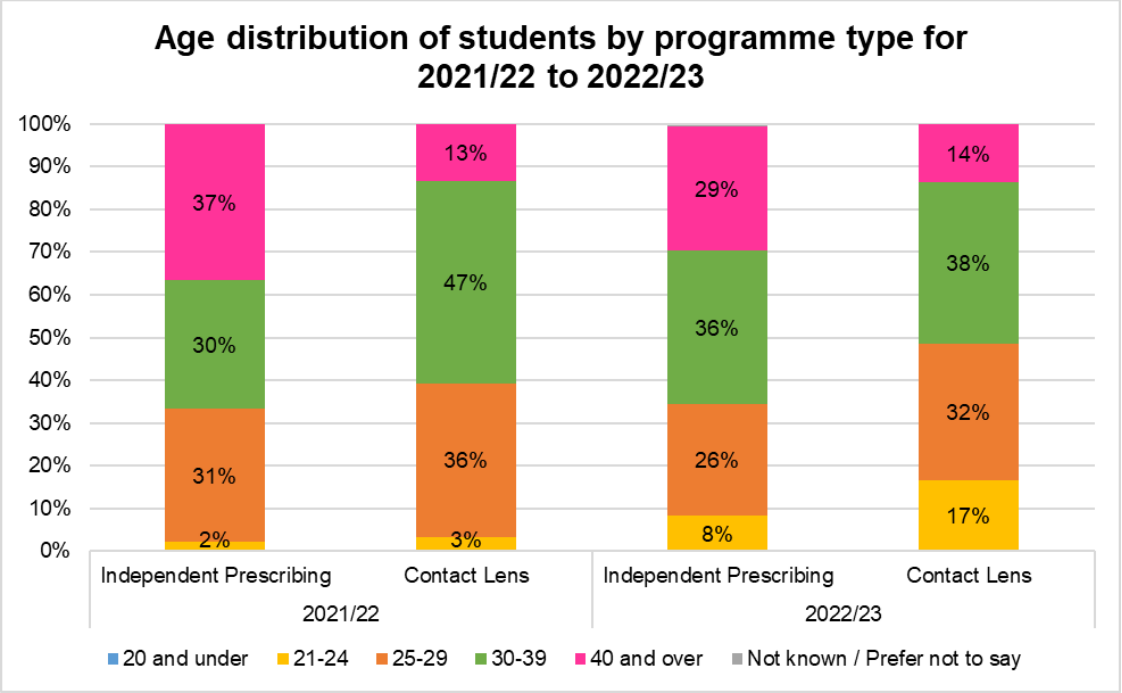


4.13 **Age:** 59% of students (57% in 2021/22) on OP qualifications are aged 20 and under. Like past years, compared to OP qualifications, DO qualifications have a wider distribution of ages and a higher proportion of students aged 30 years and over; this reflects the larger proportion of mature students enrolling on part-time DO qualifications.

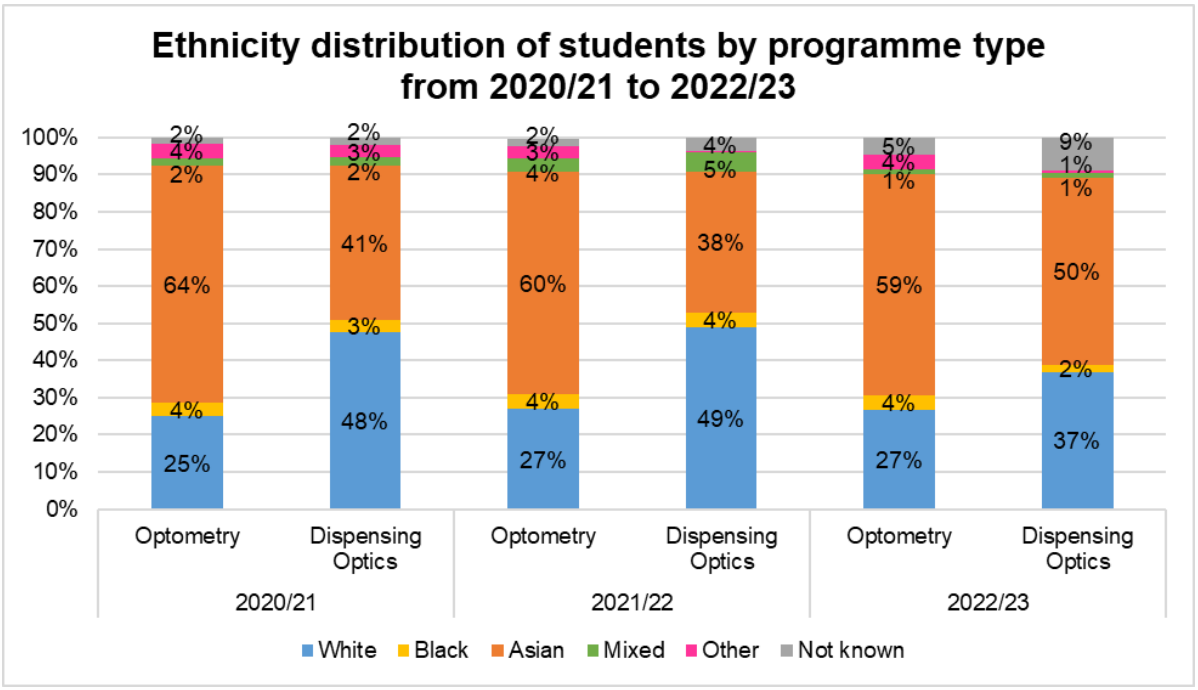


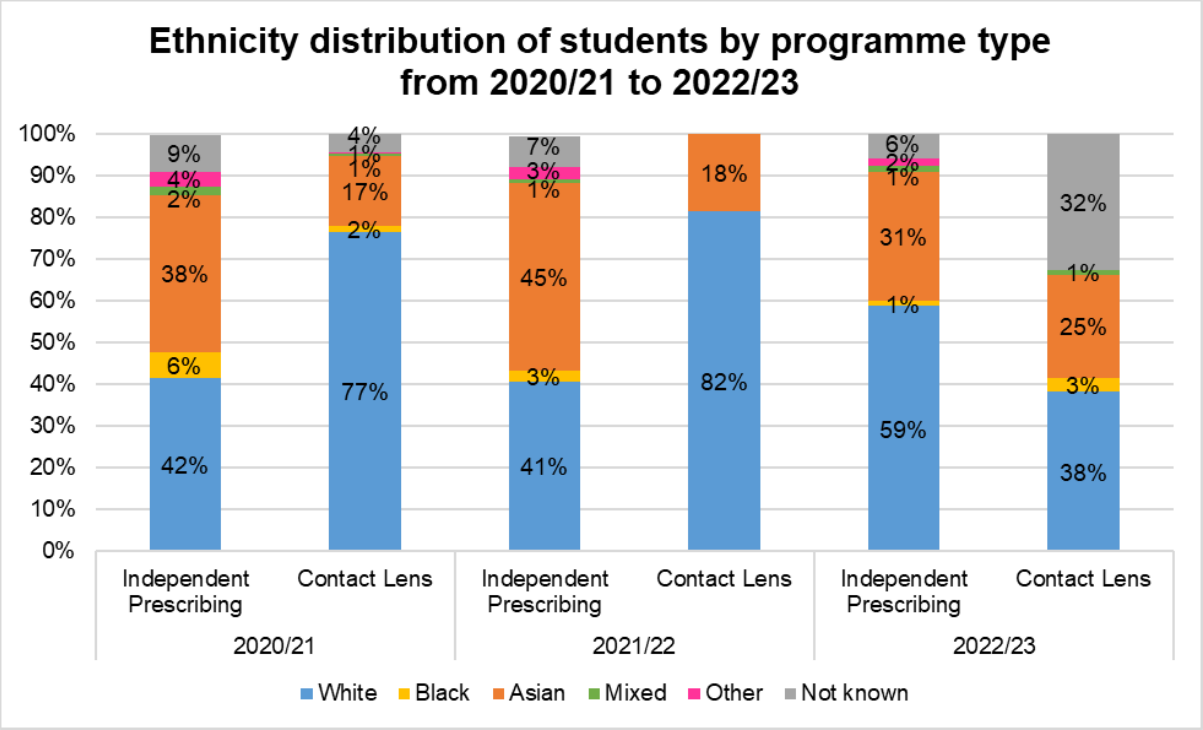
4.14 IP and CLO qualifications are currently open only to qualified practitioners and their age ranges are therefore dominated by students aged 25 and over. It is encouraging that, like in past years, a good percentage of IP and CLO

students are aged under 30; this shows that these qualifications are attractive to newly qualified practitioners.

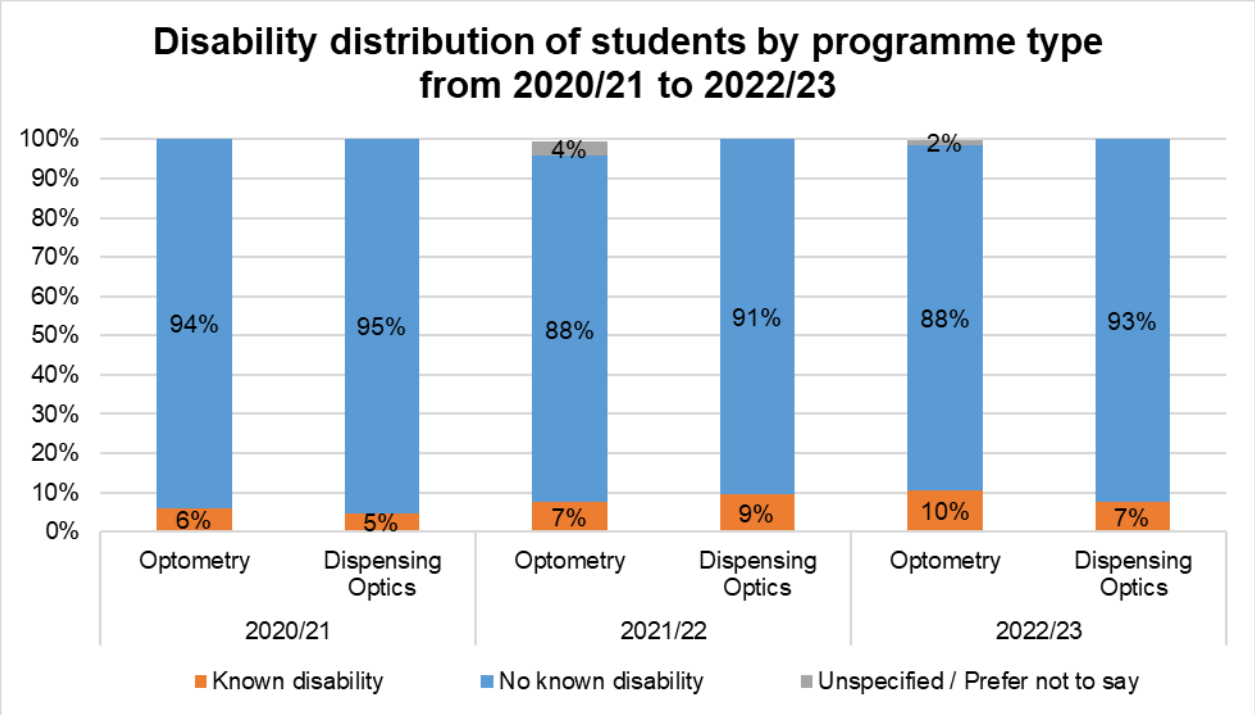


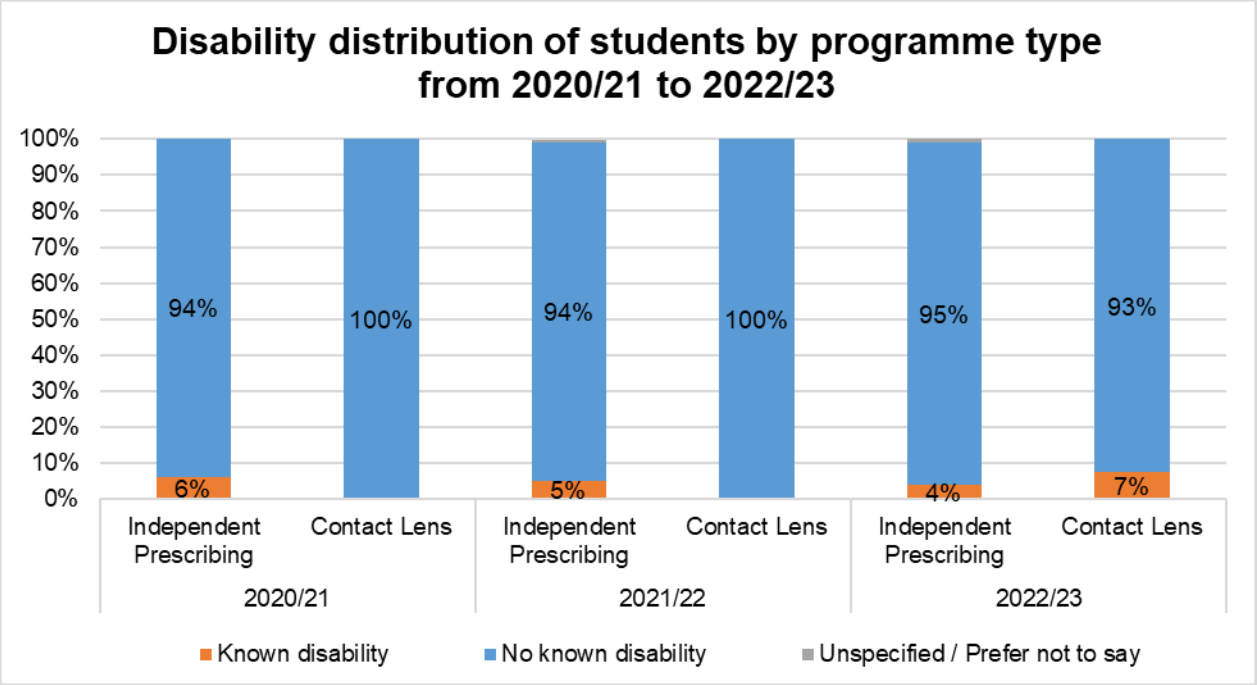
4.15 **Ethnicity:** the data for optometry qualifications is similar to previous years. There is fluctuation in the dispensing optics data between years, but the most recent cohort is more ethnically diverse.





4.16 **Disabilities:** Optometry, Dispensing Optics, and Independent Prescribing qualifications have an average of 4-10% disabled students.



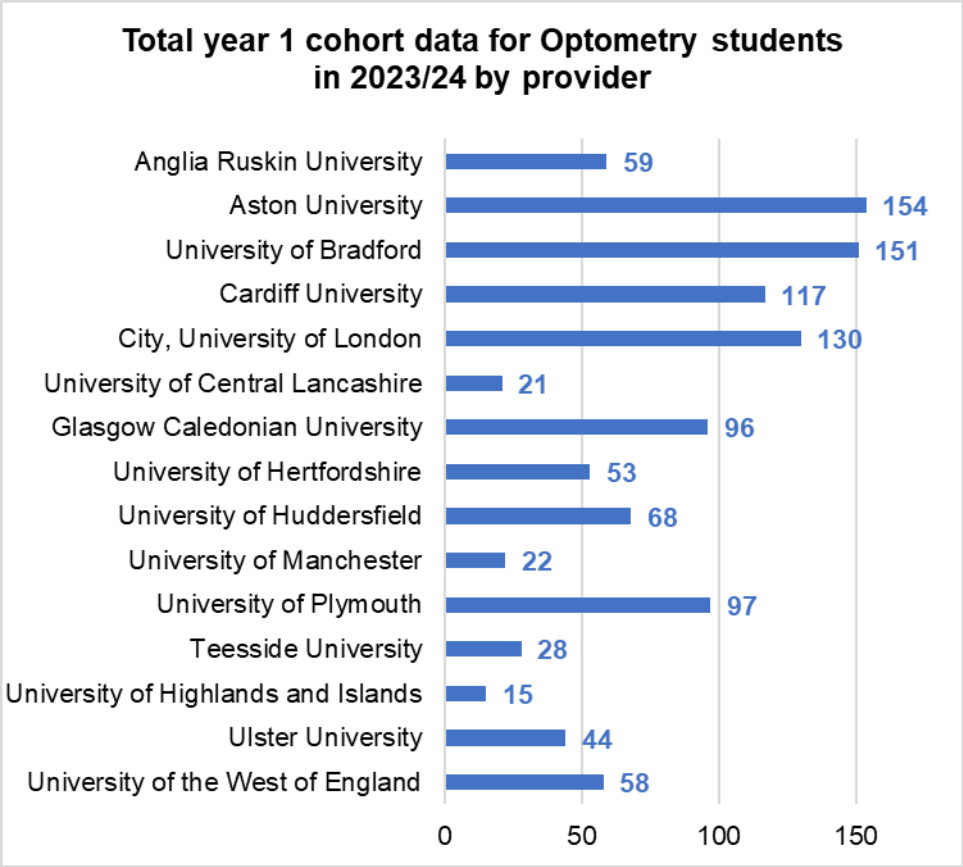

Disability distribution of students by programme type from 2020/21 to 2022/23
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
94%
100%
94%
100%
95%
93%
6%
5%
4%
7%
Independent Prescribing
Contact Lens
Independent Prescribing
Contact Lens
Independent Prescribing
Contact Lens
2020/21
2021/22
2022/23
Known disability
No known disability
Unspecified / Prefer not to say

5. Qualification Findings

5.1 Set out below is a summary of our findings for each qualification type, as follows:

- Optometry (OP)
- Independent prescribing (IP)
- Dispensing optics (DO)
- Contact lens opticians (CLO)
- Professional association offering qualifications in OP and IP
- Professional association offering qualifications in DO and CLO

Optometry (OP)



5.2 Unless otherwise indicated, the comments in this section relate to all Optometry (OP) qualifications, excluding the Optometry Stage 2 approved qualification offered by the College of Optometrists.

Themes

5.3 Overall, the information submitted continues to indicate strong performance amongst OP qualifications in several academic metrics. Resourcing required

to arrange clinical placements as part of an integrated ETR qualification remains an issue along with some concerns as to how placements will be organised. Competition from other optometry courses is an ongoing concern as noted above with impacts including the potential loss of staff and students, and we identified some concern about impending structural changes to the delivery of optometry education and training arising from new apprenticeship qualifications.

5.4 However, several opportunities were highlighted including optometry being an increasingly attractive career choice because of the enhanced clinical role of optometrists. The opportunity to widen the scope of the qualification to include clinical management in various specialisms was noted, as was the opportunity to reappraise the qualification in line with the ETR and to increase the range of clinical settings available to students. Various providers noted the development of close relationships with organisations in the local eye care community such as local hospitals, employers and charities, and the opportunity to exploit further the functionality of virtual learning environments to enhance the student experience was also raised.

5.5 Applications for OP qualifications remain strong and there remains a considerable range of small, medium, and large cohort sizes. In general, student progression through OP qualifications remains high. Student attainment for stage one, this year especially, is extremely high, with an average of 99.4% of students who completed the qualification obtaining a 2.2 or higher (95.8% in 2021/22; 96.8% in 2020/21).

Key data – Optometry qualifications

Total students	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Total Optometry students	3,270	3,296	3,454
Year 1 cohort	1,169	1,121	1,166

Metric	Lowest	Average	Highest
Proportion of applicants admitted	9.3%	21.7%	82.6%
UCAS points offer	118.2	136.0*	179.0
First year progression	42.0%	81.7%	99.0%
Progression to following year	58.0%	84.8%	100.0%
Successful completion	62.0%	90.2%	100.0%
Degree – First	10.6%	24.5%	63.0%
Degree – 2:2 or higher	96.0%	99.4%	100.0%

*The median is used here (instead of mean) for reporting admissions data to reflect different UCAS point values awarded in Scotland.

Observations

5.6 With one exception, all OP qualifications admitted between 9% and 27% of applicants to their qualification indicating good competition for places. OP qualifications admitted an average of 21.7% of applicants (21.5% in 2021/22; 21.6% in 2020/21).

5.7 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. This is in comparison to a median of 136.0 (approximately equivalent to AAB in England) in 2021/22, and 138.4 (approximately equivalent to AAB in England) in 2020/21.

5.8 The size of individual optometry qualification cohorts varies significantly. For example, the year 1 cohort size varied from 15 to 154 students (8 to 148 students in 2022/23; 8 to 177 in 2021/22).

5.9 There appears to be a decline in student progression. An average of 81.7% (84.5% in 2021/22; 88.5% in 2020/21) of students progressed to the second year, an average of 84.8% (84.1% in 2021/22; 93.3% in 2020/21) of students progressed to the following year of the qualification overall, and an average of 90.2% (91.5% in 2021/22; 95.6% in 2020/21) of final year students successfully completed the qualification.

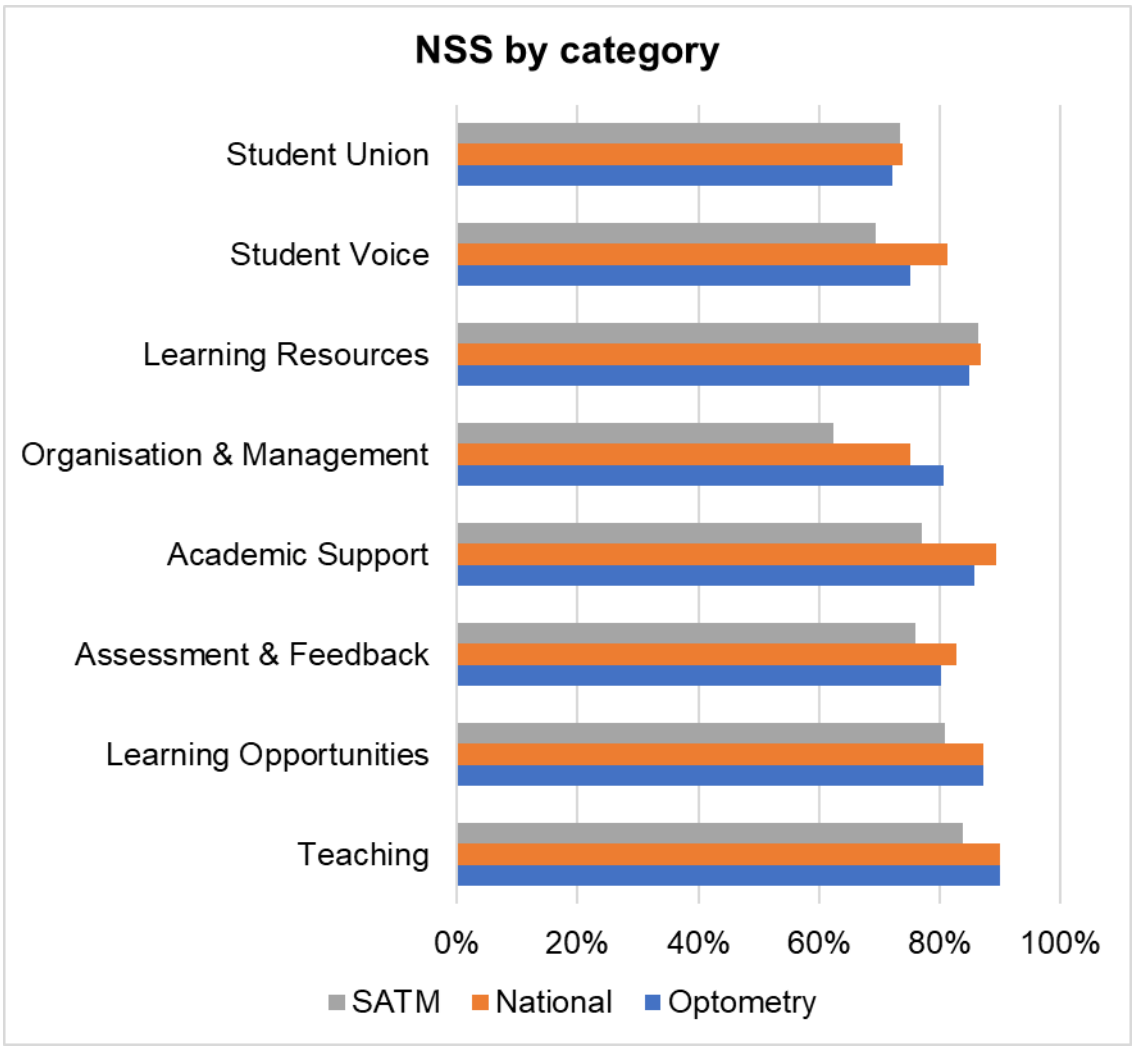
5.10 This year we asked providers for the percentage of final year students who began the qualification that successfully completed it (for the same cohort only, i.e. not including repeat year or students from other cohorts). An average of 77.2% of optometry students who began the qualification successfully completed it. Notwithstanding variance between providers, a higher average percentage of year 1 students exited the qualification without graduating compared with other cohort years in 2022/23 (8.2% in year 1; 4.4% in year 2; 1.6% in year 3).

5.11 With regards to EDI, 68.1% of students were female (64.5% in 2021/22; 65.8% in 2020/21), and 59.4% of students were Asian (59.9% in 2021/22; 63.8% in 2020/21). There is evidence of local variation, probably reflecting the demography of the local population, with four providers reporting that over 80% of its students were Asian, and one provider that over 88% of its students were white. 58.6% of students were aged 20 years or under (57.3% in 2021/22; 56.4% in 2020/21), with 84.1% aged 24 or under (83.7% in 2021/22; 82.5% in 2020/21), indicating that most are recent school leavers.

5.12 An average of 99.4% (95.8% in 2020/21; 96.8% in 2020/21) of students obtained a 2.2 degree or higher. Few students failed the qualification: an average of 0.2% (2.9% in 2021/22; (2.3% in 2020/21) of students failed, and

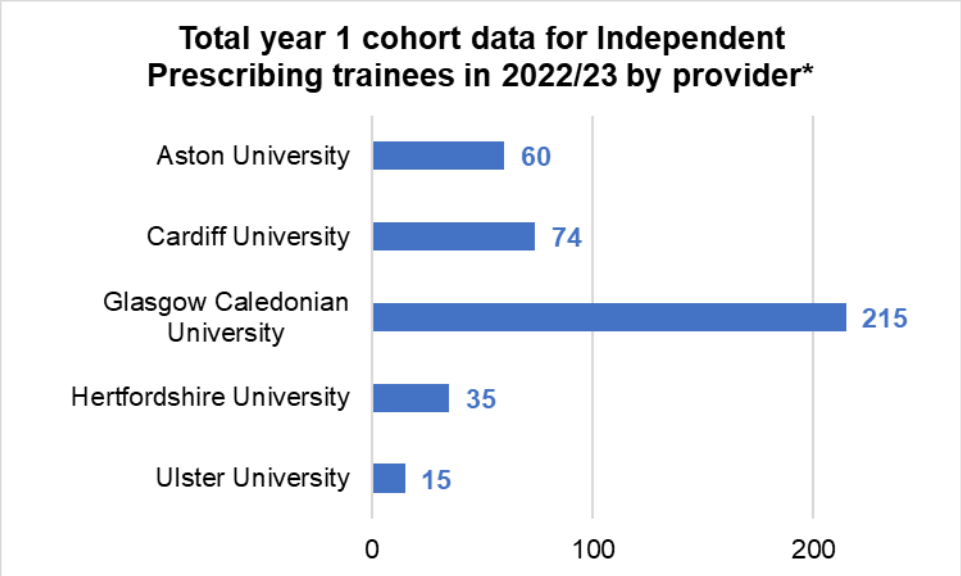
like the previous two years, all but one OP provider had less than 3% of students failing. The range of first-class degrees, looking at all providers, is from 12% to 63% (35% to 69% in 2021/22).

5.13 By category[22], the averages for student satisfaction by category are illustrated in in the chart below. The average Optometry NSS scores are between 72% and 90% for all categories.



[22] 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.

Independent Prescribing (IP)



*Cohort data for City, University of London is not collected as the programme is run as CPD modules. Please note for Independent Prescribing the previous cohort year (2022/23) is provided above as the latest data (see below for 2023/24) is incomplete due multiple intakes throughout the academic year for this qualification.

5.14 Unless otherwise indicated, the comments in this section relate to all independent prescribing and therapeutic prescribing (IP) qualifications, excluding the IP approved qualification offered by the College of Optometrists.

Themes

5.15 A number of IP qualification providers highlighted the specialist expertise of their staff, and some noted the involvement of staff from disciplines including pharmacy and ophthalmology. Continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on availability of clinical placements was noted by a provider, although online delivery of teaching alleviated this concern. Whilst the use of hybrid and entirely online delivery models appears to have increased access to IP qualifications, it has nevertheless increased reliance on digital infrastructure systems which could be vulnerable to a system failure.

5.16 IP qualifications are not covered by the National Student Survey, but most qualifications reported the results of internal processes capturing student views which showed positive student feedback.

Key data – IP qualifications

Total students	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Total IP students	541	435	521
Year 1 cohort*	412	272	399

(*IP cohort data excludes a provider that runs its IP qualification as CPD modules and therefore does not admit a cohort hence the lower figure for all years noted.)

Metric	Lowest	Average	Highest
Applicants admitted	65.9%	91.4%	100.0%
Attainment – pass or higher	96.0%	98.3%	100.0%

Observations

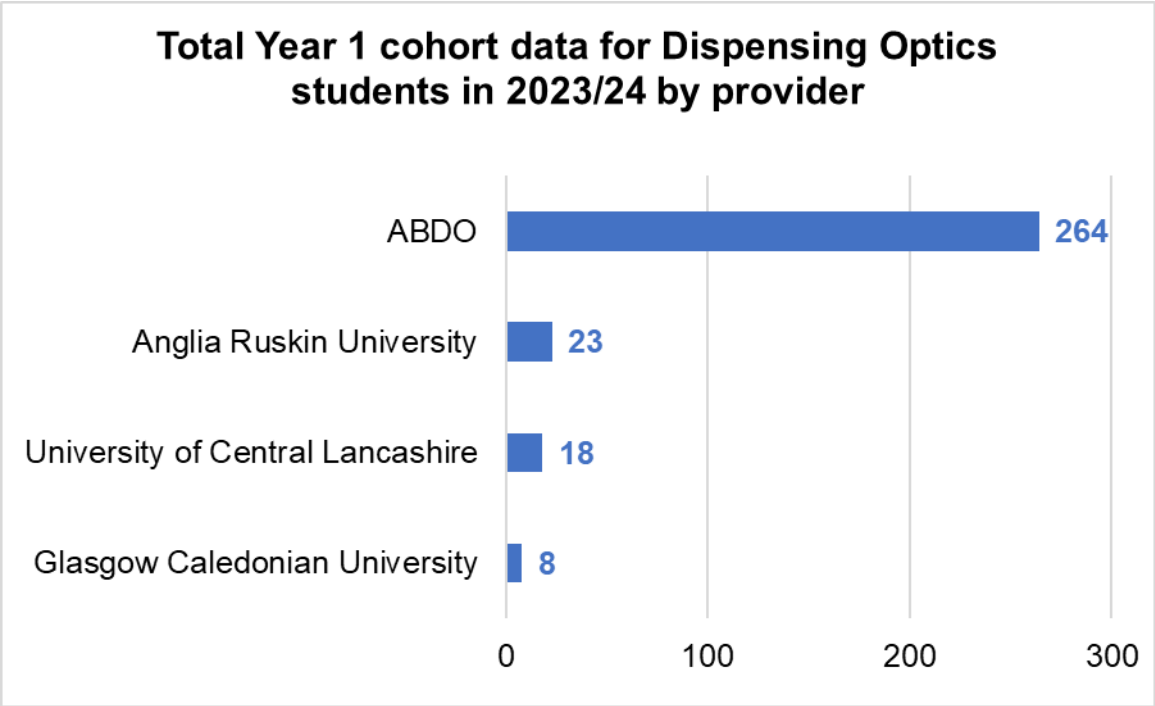
5.17 IP qualifications in 2022/23 admitted a significantly higher number of trainees than in 2021/22. Providers continue to admit a high proportion of applicants: an average of 91.4% applicants (84.2% in 2021/22; 78.6% in 2020/21) were admitted.

5.18 The size of IP qualification cohorts varies significantly: the average year 1 cohort size in 2023/24 was 53 (80 in 2021/23; (54 in 2021/22) but varied from 13 to 108 (15 to 215 in 2022/23; 16 to 93 in 2021/22) students.

5.19 An average of 98.3% (92.9% in 2021/22; 94.2% in 2020/21) of students passed the IP qualification, with three of the six qualifications having a pass rate of 100%.

5.20 EDI data showed that most IP students were white, female, and aged 30 to 39. 65.1% of students were aged over 30, and 26.3% were between the ages of 25 and 29.

Dispensing Optics



5.21 Unless otherwise indicated, the comments in this section relate to all Dispensing Optics (DO) qualifications, excluding the DO Stage 2 approved qualification offered by the ABDO.

Themes

5.22 Total student numbers for DO qualifications have increased significantly by 19.2% from the previous year.

5.23 DO qualifications maintained good student progression for most qualifications. Student attainment is also good.

5.24 Participation in the NSS was limited, as per usual, for reasons including qualification ineligibility. However, qualifications that did participate performed well.

5.25 Providers noted the knowledge and experience of their staffing team, and some referred to their research expertise resulting in the publication of articles in academic journals. The development of staff was also a theme raised with reported sponsorship arrangements to offer staff a recognised qualification. As with optometry qualifications, use of the virtual learning environment is being expanded to include more interactive technologies enabling students to access resources and engage with each other.

5.26 A key opportunity noted in submissions is the development of dispensing optics apprenticeship qualifications which will allow students to achieve a degree award as part of their apprenticeship.

Key data – DO qualifications

Total students	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Total DO students	763	783	969
Year 1 cohort	303	346	357

Metric	Lowest	Average	Highest
Proportion of applicants admitted	21.7%	56.4%	96.1%
UCAS points offer	24.0	61.3	133.0
First year progression	25.0%	75.6%	100.0%
Progression to following year	62.5%	88.8%	100.0%
Successful completion	56.3%	83.2%	100.0%
Degree – First	8.3%	23.2%	36.0%
Degree – 2:2 or higher	83.3%	93.3%	100.0%
Degree – Distinction	36.4%	52.1%	70.0%
Degree – Pass, Merit, or Distinction	77.3%	84.1%	95.0%

Observations

5.27 DO qualifications admitted an average of 56.4% (73.7% in 2021/22; 74.2% in 2020/21) applicants. There is significant variance across DO qualifications, with two qualifications admitting over 84% of its applicants, five between 40% and 50%, and one at 22%. Two courses, however, are not statistically significant due to the very small number of students on the qualification – the 22% provider being one of them.

5.28 Four DO qualifications required A Levels for entry. The average UCAS points offer data quoted includes only these qualifications. The other four qualifications require other qualifications, typically at GCSE level with practical experience also required.

5.29 There is considerable variance in the average UCAS tariff points offer made to students entering DO qualifications. The average UCAS offer was 61.3 points (approximately equivalent to DDE at A-Level); this compares to an average of 46.8 points (EEE) in 2021/22, and 66.8 points (DDE) in 2020/21.

5.30 The average cohort sizes across the qualifications were 45 students in 2023/24 (38 in 2022/23; 34 in 2021/22) in year 1, 37 students (32 in 2022/23; 21 in 2021/22) in year 2, and 39 students (21 in 2022/23; 39 in 2021/22) in year 3.

5.31 EDI data showed that an average of 70.6% (65.6% in 2021/22; 63.3% in 2020/21) DO students were female and 37.0% (48.9% in 2021/22; 47.6% in 2020/21) were white. There is evidence of local variation, probably reflecting the demography of the local population, with four providers reporting that over 70% of its students were Asian, and two with over 75% of students being white.

5.32 An average of 75.6% (73.7% in 2021/22; 79.7% in 2020/21) students on DO qualifications progressed to the second year of the qualification. An average of 88.8% (87.3% in 2021/22; 87.4% in 2020/21) of all DO students progressed to the following year of DO qualifications, and an average of 83.2% (93.9% in 2021/22; 90.4% in 2020/21) of students successfully completed their qualifications.

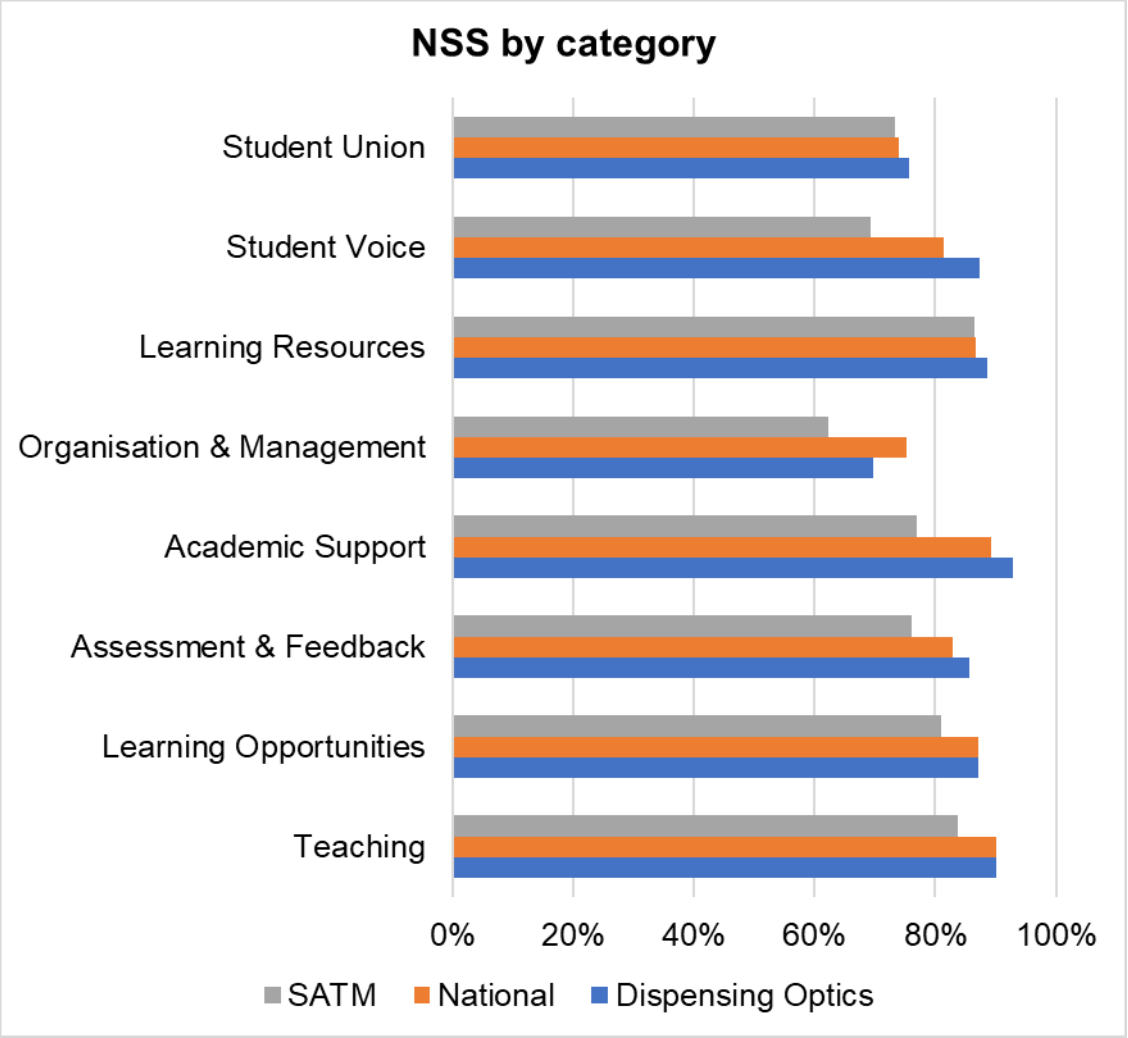
5.33 Progression rates for DO qualifications are similar to OP qualifications.

5.34 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) and some are not classified at all. An average of 93.3% (94.1% in 2021/22; 97.5% in 2020/21) of students obtained either a 2:2 or higher (for honours degrees), or a pass or higher (for non-honours qualifications).

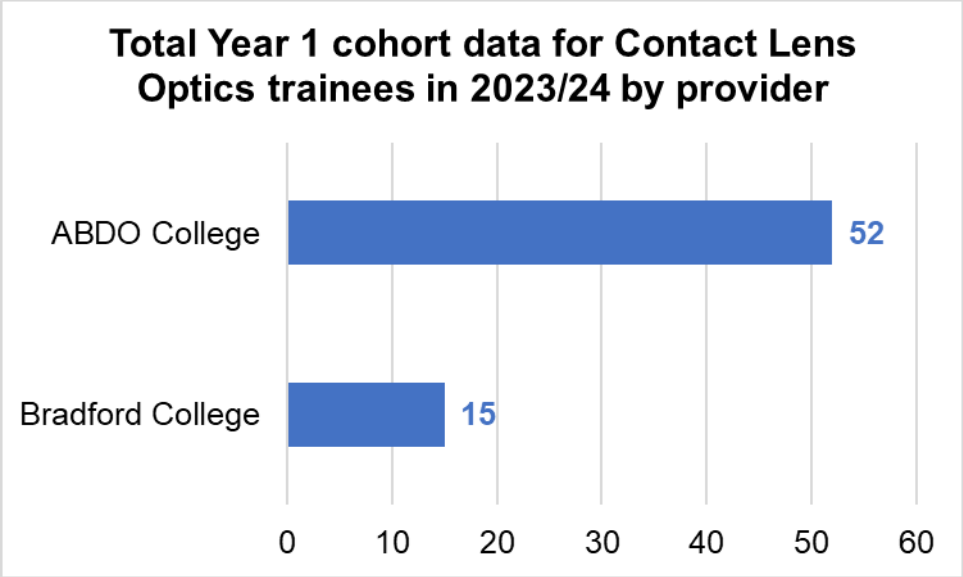
5.35 This year we asked providers for the percentage of final year students who began the qualification that successfully completed it (for the same cohort only, i.e. not including repeat year or students from other cohorts). An average of 62.6% of DO students who began the qualification successfully completed it. Notwithstanding variance between providers, a higher average percentage of year 1 students exited the qualification without graduating compared with other cohort years in 2022/23 (18.0% in year 1; 4.4% in year 2; 1.4% in year 3).

5.36 By category[23], the average score for DO qualifications in the NSS is above the national average for 6 of the 8 categories and above the average for SATM for all categories. The averages by category are illustrated in the chart below.

[23] 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.


NSS by category
Student Union
Student Voice
Learning Resources
Organisation & Management
Academic Support
Assessment & Feedback
Learning Opportunities
Teaching
0%
20%
40%
60%
80%
100%
SATM
National
Dispensing Optics

Contact Lens Opticians (CLO)



5.37 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.

Themes

5.38 One provider had by a comfortable distance most of all CLO trainees with 44 admitted in 2022/23, a 75% share. The combined cohort of trainees for 2023/24 (67) is higher than the previous year (+8).

5.39 The publication of articles in ophthalmic journals, utilisation of interactive technologies to enhance engagement with students and staff, and the experience and knowledge of staff supporting qualification delivery were themes noted in provider submissions.

Key data – CLO qualifications

Total students	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Total students in year 1 cohort	66	59	67

Metric	Lowest	Average	Highest
Applicants admitted	83.0%	91.5%	100.0%
Attainment – pass or higher*	42.1%	42.1%	42.1%

*Only one qualification has attainment data.

Observations

5.40 All CLO qualifications admitted over 83% of their applicants (90% in 2021/22). Recruitment to programmes increased slightly since the previous year, and one provider has not admitted students to its course since the previous year. Regarding cohort sizes, one provider recruited a cohort of 44 students, the other provider recruited 15 students.

5.41 CLO qualifications do not participate in the NSS. Most qualifications indicated that they use alternative methods to obtain feedback and monitor student satisfaction with the qualification. These include internal surveys and face-to-face or online meetings allowing trainees to raise concerns or give feedback.

5.42 EDI data shows, like the previous year, that most CLO students were females (80.2%). 51.3% (60.7% in 2021/22) of CLO students were aged 30 years or above, which is unsurprising for a qualification taken after initial qualification.

5.43 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.

GOC Awarding Body Approved Qualifications offered by the College of Optometrists (Optometry and Independent Prescribing)

5.44 Unless otherwise indicated, the comments in this section relate to approved qualifications offered by the College of Optometrists in Optometry (the Scheme for Registration) and Independent Prescribing (Therapeutic Final Common Assessment).

Themes

5.45 The provider notes that this year's (2022/23) optometry examination sittings have all been larger than expected with more trainees failing after four attempts than usual. However, the pass rate for optometry is high as the key data below illustrates. For independent prescribing, the provider notes an increase on the previous year in the number of candidates taking the examination.

Key data – attainment data

Qualification	Pass rate
Optometry (Scheme for Registration) (27-month)	96.3%
Independent Prescribing (Therapeutic Final Common Assessment)	76.0%

Observations

5.46 The Optometry Scheme for Registration is based on the GOC's current competencies contained in the 2015 handbook which utilises an assessment regime in which a number of competencies are assessed under direct observation, rather than focussing on broad capabilities. The provider notes that by necessity, the Scheme is defined by the current stage 2 competencies which don't fully reflect contemporary practice and that some trainees have a negative experience of the Scheme and that trainees are progressing through the Scheme too slowly.

5.47 Uncertainty remains as to how long the Scheme will remain in place with the implementation of the ETR. The provider notes there will come a point where the Scheme is unviable to administer, and the question will be what happens to the trainees affected by this. The provider cites employers that have reported significant variability in the levels of competence and experience of international trainees who do not have trailing competencies, noting that some are struggling to complete, and some seem ready for registration at the start of the Scheme. Opportunities cited by the provider include updating the Scheme in the context of the ETR as well as learning from delivering and reviewing the Scheme that can inform implementation of the ETR.

5.48 Examples of good practice cited by the provider include engaging extensively with providers and employers to support trainee preparation for OSCEs, provision of comprehensive monthly data on trainee progression for employers to ensure support for trainees at each stage of their journey, and the provision of additional sessions for identified trainees who appear to be struggling in their progress through the Scheme for Registration.

5.49 In terms of GOC future activity, we will adapt our process for managing applications from optical professionals who have qualified outside of the UK following the approval by Council of the ETR in February 2021.

GOC Awarding Body Approved Qualifications offered by the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (Dispensing and Contact Lens Opticians)

5.50 The comments in this section relate to the approved stage 2 qualifications delivered by the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO) in Dispensing Optics and Contact Lens Optician for students who completed their State 1 qualifications at ABDO College, Bradford College, City & Islington College, Glasgow Caledonian University, and the University of Central Lancashire.

Themes

5.51 The pass rates submitted by ABDO were calculated on differing bases from academic qualification (stage 1) pass rates. A small percentage of DO trainees passed their final practical examinations as can be seen in the attainment data below. However, the pass rate of 25% includes caveats; there are four individual sections of which lack of success in one of the sections will be classed as a failed attempt, moreover, of the failed attempts, re-submission of portfolio work may result in a pass award.

Key data – student attainment data

Qualification	Pass rate
Dispensing – Practical	25.0%
Contact Lens – Practical	56.3%

5.52 As noted above, the ABDO's DO qualification reported a pass rate of 25.0% (30.0% in 2021/22; 53.0% in 2020/21) for the sittings of its examinations.

5.53 The CLO qualification reported a pass rate of 56.3% (59.0% in 2021/22; 49.0% in 2020/21).

Observations

5.54 For both awarding body qualifications the provider notes that its examination venue enables it to offer 4 sittings a year providing students with quicker opportunities to complete their qualifications in an easily accessible location. The provider has recently implemented a detailed statistical analysis of assessment results in response to GOC feedback which will inform the review of its syllabus. Meanwhile, examinations for both qualifications have been moved to an online format.

5.55 The provider notes that it will continue to implement safety measures following the COVID-19 pandemic to provide a safe and secure environment for candidates, examiners, patients and staff, and will retain a flexible approach to ensure it can adapt to changing circumstances in the future. The provider also referred to a large and well-established collection of resources including over 100 trained professionals forming the assessment team.

5.56 These qualifications do not participate in the NSS but instead use alternative methods to capture and monitor student feedback on the qualifications such as issuing surveys to students following their exams.

Annex 1: Background information

Annual monitoring and reporting requirements

A1.1 The GOC Council 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 (A&QA) of qualifications, all providers are required to demonstrate how their approved qualification(s) meet our requirements, as currently listed in our handbooks. We seek assurance from these providers in several ways, including quality assurance visits, notification of reportable events and changes, conditions management, and the annual compulsory AMR submission. We also scrutinise and note proposed adaptations to qualifications to ensure they meet the ETR requirements.

Annual monitoring and reporting process

A1.4 Providers were required to report information for the period 1 September 2022 – 31 August 2023.

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 31 October 2023. Providers were required to submit a completed form by 29 January 2024. Compliance with this year's AMR process was good, with all returns submitted by 5 February 2024. Responses to additional queries were generally prompt. No compliance breaches occurred.

A1.7 Every AMR return 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 sector report provides a high-level summary of the outcomes of the 2022/23 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. All qualifications during 2022/23 were delivered to the current handbook requirements.

A1.11 We consider all feedback from stakeholders regarding the 2022/23 AMR process and use this to help refine the AMR process.

A1.12 The publication of this report closes the 2022/23 AMR process.

Caveats to the Sector Report

A4.13 The AMR process is in continuous development and we will make refinements and improvements for each year of the process. Significant changes will be required from the 2023/24 reporting year where qualifications will be delivered against both the existing handbooks and ETR.

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 return 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 2022 – 31 August 2023.

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	48.6%	42.4%	120.0**	136.0
Optometry	21.7%	18.2%	136.7**	136.0
Dispensing Optics	56.4%	52.3%	61.3	44.0
Independent Prescribing	91.4%	100.0%	N/A	N/A
Contact Lens Opticians	91.5%	91.5%	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.
**Scotland UCAS points are different to England, so these values slightly skew the average.

B. Average cohort data (2023/24)

	Year 1	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**
Optometry	70	74	72	28
Dispensing Optics	25	37	39	N/A
Independent Prescribing	53	N/A	N/A	N/A
Contact Lens Opticians	22	N/A	N/A	N/A

C. Student average progression

	Progression from first year	**Progression to the following year**	**Students completing the qualification**
Optometry	81.7%	84.8%	86.5%
Dispensing Optics	88.8%	83.2%	100.0%

D. Student average attainment: Optometry, Dispensing Optics, and both qualifications

	Good Pass*	**Fail**
Both qualifications	98.0%	0.5%
Optometry	99.4%	0.2%
Dispensing Optics	93.3%	2.1%

*a good pass is a 2:2 degree or higher

E. Student average attainment: Independent Prescribing and Contact Lens Opticians

	Pass	Fail
Independent Prescribing	98.3%	1.0%
Contact Lens Opticians	42.1%	N/A

F. Student average attainment: Professional Associations

	Pass	Fail
Professional Association (Dispensing & Contact Lens Opticians)	40.6%	59.4%
Professional Association (Independent Prescribing & Optometry)	86.2%	13.9%

G. National Student Survey – average satisfaction score by category

	All qualifications	Optometry	Dispensing Optics	Subjects Allied to Medicine
Teaching	90.0%	90.0%	90.1%	83.8%
Learning Opportunities	87.3%	87.3%	87.1%	80.9%
Assessment & Feedback	81.2%	80.1%	85.5%	76.0%
Academic Support	87.2%	85.8%	92.8%	77.0%
Organisation & Management	78.4%	80.6%	69.7%	62.3%
Learning Resources	85.6%	84.8%	88.6%	86.4%
Student Voice	77.6%	75.2%	87.4%	69.3%
Student Union	72.9%	72.2%	75.7%	73.4%

H. EDI – Average gender data

	Female	Male
All qualifications*	66.2%	31.2%
Optometry	68.1%	31.5%
Dispensing Optics	70.6%	29.4%
Independent Prescribing	50.4%	36.3%
Contact Lens Opticians	80.2%	19.8%

*These two values total only <98% because one provider had 80% of its students prefer not to say, thus the total is not closer to 100%

I. EDI – Average age data

	20 & under	21-24	25-29	30-39	40 and over	Unknown / Prefer not to say
All qualifications	35.8%	23.3%	15.2%	16.0%	9.7%	0.1%
Optometry	58.6%	25.5%	6.9%	5.0%	3.2%	0.5%
Dispensing Optics	31.3%	30.9%	16.9%	15.0%	5.9%	0.0%
Independent Prescribing	0.0%	8.2%	26.3%	35.8%	29.3%	0.3%
Contact Lens Opticians	0.0%	16.7%	32.0%	37.7%	13.7%	0.0%

J. EDI – average disability data

	Known disability	No known disability	Unspecified / Prefer not to say
All qualifications	8.1%	91.0%	0.9%
Optometry	10.3%	87.7%	1.5%
Dispensing Optics	7.5%	92.5%	0.0%
Independent Prescribing	3.8%	95.4%	0.8%
Contact Lens Opticians	7.3%	92.7%	0.0%

K. EDI – Average ethnicity data

	White	Black	Asian	Mixed	Other	Not known
All qualifications	36.8%	2.9%	49.0%	1.5%	2.2%	7.7%
Optometry	26.7%	3.9%	59.4%	1.4%	3.9%	4.6%
Dispensing Optics	37.0%	1.9%	50.2%	1.5%	0.6%	8.8%
Independent Prescribing	58.7%	1.2%	31.0%	1.4%	1.8%	5.8%
Contact Lens Opticians	38.2%	3.3%	24.7%	1.4%	0.0%	32.5%

L. EDI – Average refugee status data

	Refugee
All qualifications	<0.1%
Optometry	0.1%
Dispensing Optics	0.0%
Independent Prescribing	0.0%
Contact Lens Opticians	0.0%

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?	
10	How clear were the marking criteria used to assess your work?	**Assessment & Feedback**
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?	
14	How often does feedback help you to improve your work?	
15	How easy was it to contact teaching staff when you needed to?	**Academic Support**
16	How well have teaching staff supported your learning?	
17	How well organised is your course?	**Organisation & Management**
18	How well were any changes to teaching on your course communicated?	
19	How well have the IT resources and facilities supported your learning?	**Learning Resources**
20	How well have the library resources (e.g. books, online services and learning spaces) supported your learning?	
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?	**Student Voice**
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**

10 Old Bailey
020 7580 3898
education@optical.org
Published November 2024

General Optical Council