General Optical Council

EDI STRATEGY

2025 – 2030

Introduction

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is central to how we regulate, how we engage with stakeholders and all those who use our services, and our actions as a responsible employer. Our EDI ambitions are embedded within our overarching strategic objectives. Everyone needs access to safe and effective care, and eye care professionals need to be able to provide patient-centred care in a positive workplace culture where they are respected and treated fairly by employers, colleagues and patients.

What we have achieved

Our work promoting equality of opportunity and eliminating discrimination, as described in our EDI strategies and annual reports (covering the period from 2020 to 2025) has been delivered against a backdrop of considerable change. In this context, we have significantly improved our collection, analysis and use of EDI data, which means that we now better understand the diversity of our registrants, including optical students, and the diversity of our members and employees. We are using this data to identify and address unfair outcomes in Fitness to Practise (FtP) referrals; identify and address barriers to differential student attainment; ensure EDI is embedded in all our policies and procedures and in our regulatory functions; and understand the impact of intersectionality. We have also used the research and data we collect to identify barriers for patients to accessing eye care services, and to understand more about the incidence of bullying, harassment and abuse, and discrimination in optical practice.

As an employer, we have worked hard to create a workplace culture where everyone can thrive and feel valued, regardless of their background, identity or circumstances. We have established strong staff networks to promote inclusivity and a culture where colleagues feel they can share their lived experiences. We have started to integrate the concept of structural discrimination into our management practices to better promote fairness and increase our confidence in identifying and tackling discrimination and inequality, as well as update all our people policies to ensure they are fair, inclusive and consistently applied.

EDI IS EMBEDDED IN ALL OUR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

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Our EDI objectives to 2030

Our EDI objectives, which will enable us to effectively realise our strategy as an inclusive, trusted and fair regulator, are:

- Be active in addressing inequality and preventing discrimination
- Promote and reflect diversity
- Foster inclusivity and accessibility
- Build a culture of confidence in EDI

Implementing the strategy

This strategy reflects our role both as a regulator and as a responsible employer, and aims to integrate EDI into all our work, not only because we have a legal duty to have due regard to promoting equality of opportunity and eliminating discrimination, but because it is the right thing to do, for patients, our registrants and our workforce.

EDI leadership

The successful execution of our EDI strategy will require us to be effective, informed and committed leaders, and we will continue to

invest in developing our internal capability by ensuring there is appropriate EDI expertise within our Council and Council committees, and within our management and senior leadership teams. We will work hard to ensure our governance and leadership better represents the communities we serve, and we will use our convening role to listen to and work with our stakeholders to promote EDI within the professions and businesses we regulate. Our EDI Manager will continue to share their expertise to empower our managers and leaders to embed EDI in all that we do with ever-greater confidence. Our actions promoting EDI and in identifying and tackling discrimination and inequality will be evidence-based and informed by data, research and insight.

Public and patients

We will prioritise identifying and removing barriers that patients and the public may encounter when engaging with us and when seeking eye care services, particularly those barriers which affect some groups more than

OUR ACTIONS WILL BE EVIDENCE-BASED AND INFORMED BY DATA, RESEARCH AND INSIGHT

others. Our work will be informed by an accurate understanding of the diverse needs of patients and the public, and we will work hard to ensure the patient voice is heard within our decision-making. We will make sure that our regulatory processes and the decisions we take are fair and consistent and embody the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion.

Our workforce

EDI is a shared responsibility, and we will continue to provide our members, employees, workers and contractors (our workforce) with regular EDI learning and development opportunities to ensure everyone has the skills and knowledge they need to embed EDI effectively in the delivery of our regulatory functions, with a particular focus on developing our current and prospective people managers. We value the diverse perspectives and backgrounds our workforce brings and we will continue to support our employee networks so that they are well-equipped to provide additional peer support and awareness raising, cultivating a culture that promotes diversity and builds employee confidence in fostering equality. A diverse workforce ensures greater creativity, stronger governance and accountability, and better decision-making, and we will continue to support the expert contributions of our members, employees, workers and contractors in our regulatory activity, and provide them with the learning and support to be inclusive in all they do.

Our registrants

Our registrants need to be able to provide patient-centred care in an environment which is free from bias, and where they are respected and treated fairly by employers, colleagues and patients. We will continue to work with our stakeholders to combat bullying, harassment and abuse, and discrimination in optical practices and to better support registrants to meet their patients' needs, especially those in vulnerable circumstances. We will continue our work to ensure equitable access to eye care services and to identify and address unfair outcomes in Fitness to Practise (FtP) referrals.

OUR EDI STRATEGY IS CONSCIOUSLY ASPIRATIONAL

Our data

We will continue to collect EDI data from our employees, workers and members, and from our registrants, and we will further develop our analysis and use of this data to identify trends, barriers to participation and other forms of potential marginalisation, as well as monitor our progress in achieving change. We will continue to publish our EDI data in our annual EDI and other reports and encourage use of our published data by our stakeholders. We also use qualitative data gathered through surveys, roundtables, and research examining lived experiences to assess our progress in terms of advancing equality of opportunity, fostering good relations and eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

Our culture

We intend to strengthen our cultural and EDI practices to ensure successful implementation of this strategy. This will include ensuring our policies are regularly reviewed and consistently applied. In the medium term we intend to improve how we undertake equality impact assessments, to ensure that when exercising our public functions and developing policy proposals, we fully consider the equality and diversity implications and impact of our proposed actions. We aim to ensure that our regulatory functions and policies work to positively support the different groups that interact with them.

Our ambition

Our EDI strategy is consciously aspirational, especially in setting our objectives. Advancing equality, promoting diversity and fostering inclusion is a long-term, multigenerational commitment and is entwinned with the challenge of delivering public benefit within a structurally discriminatory society. Rightly, our objectives are stretching, and even though we know it might not be possible for us to deliver them all within the next five years, the act of setting objectives we might not achieve is beneficial, creating the cultural and practical momentum for the positive change we seek both as an employer and as a regulator.

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Actions and measures

1 Be a leader in addressing negative workplace culture in regulatory practice and supporting the sector to tackle barriers to accessing eye care services.

MEASURE: Improvements in workplace culture shown through Registrant Survey.

MEASURE: Improvements in access shown through Public Perceptions Survey.

MEASURE: We shall maintain a presence in cross-regulatory EDI work through attendance at forums such as the Institute of Regulation and Association of Chief Executives.

MEASURE: Continued engagement with patient groups and charities to monitor access issues and identify solutions and best practice.

WE SHALL MAINTAIN A PRESENCE IN CROSS-REGULATORY EDI WORK

2 Ensure our processes deliver fair outcomes for our workforce, registrants, and the public.

MEASURE: Monitor the EDI data of internal complaints and grievances to analyse trends in outcomes.

MEASURE: Monitor the EDI data of Fitness to Practice decisions to ensure fairness.

MEASURE: Our workforce is trained and confident in how to handle EDI issues and to support marginalised individuals.

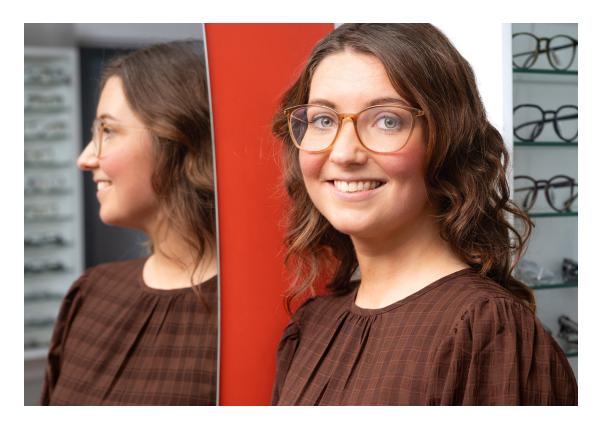**3** EDI informs all our policy development and decision-making

MEASURE: Demonstrable evidence of where our policies have been improved using our Equality Impact Assessment process.

MEASURE: All relevant employees and members trained on the use of Equality Impact Assessments.

MEASURE: Use staff and member surveys to monitor confidence and consistency of approach to implementing EDI initiatives.

4 Be a culturally safe organisation that welcomes challenge on EDI matters from all our people.

MEASURE: Training on cultural safety as part of annual employee training schedule.

MEASURE: Assess confidence level through the staff and member surveys.

MEASURE: Monitor the incidence of internal complaints and grievances and associated EDI data.

5 Use our understanding of structural discrimination and intersectionality to develop and ensure consistent application of all GOC policies and procedures.

MEASURE: Employee and member surveys to measure level of confidence in concepts of intersectionality and structural discrimination.

MEASURE: All people managers to be trained and confident in their understanding of structural discrimination and intersectionality and how this applies to their work.

MEASURE: Intersectionality included within Equality Impact Assessments and actively strengthening policy decisions.

6 Attract and retain diverse talent and improve representation of the diversity of the community at all levels of our workforce.

MEASURE: Monitoring of recruitment, hiring, and retention data and EDI monitoring data of our workforce.

MEASURE: Continually examine recruitment methods and ensure we are advertising to a broad range of groups.

MEASURE: Analysis of EDI monitoring data for our workforce over time to demonstrate increased representation of marginalised identities at all levels.

MEASURE: Achieve Disability Confident Level 3.

MEASURE: All hiring managers and members responsible for recruitment and selection decisions to undertake specific EDI training.

7 Close pay gaps in relation to gender, race, and disability.

MEASURE: Continue to publish pay gap data and use the data to identify causes of pay disparity, and to demonstrate where pay gaps are closing.

WE WILL CONTINUE TO PUBLISH PAY GAP DATA