



General Optical Council

**Business Plan 2025-26**

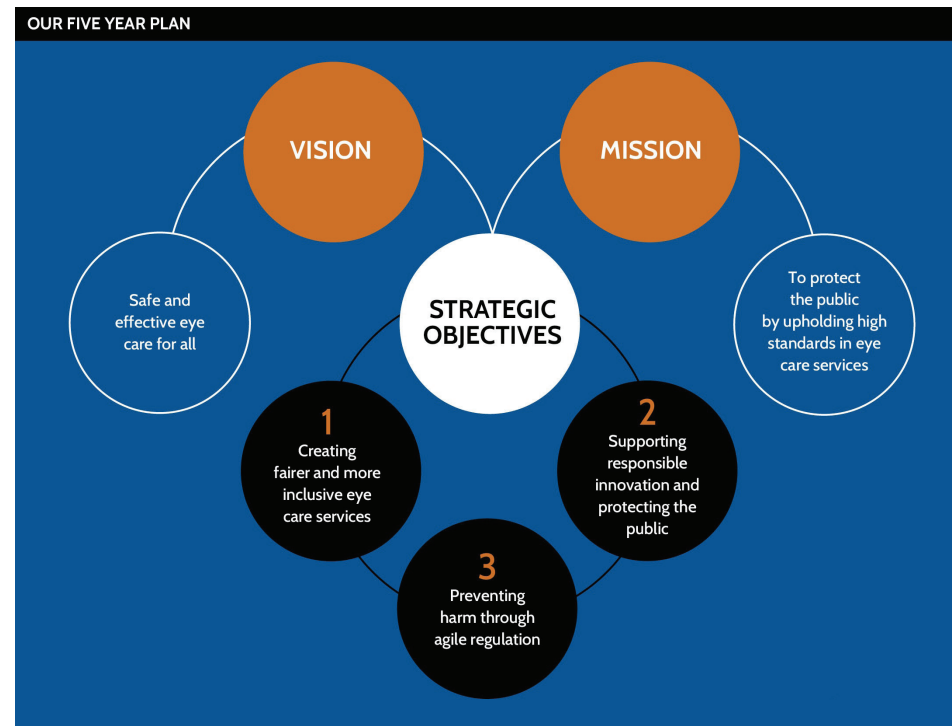


# Safe and effective eye care for all

We regulate optometrists, dispensing opticians, students and some eye care businesses in the UK. Our 2030 vision is safe and effective eye care for all. Our ambition remains to be a world-class regulator, well regarded by our stakeholders and continuing to meet all the Professional Standards Authority's (PSA) Standards of Good Regulation.

Our core role is to deliver agile, robust and effective regulation that protects the public by upholding high standards in eye care services, supports professionals to deliver quality care, and meets the needs of the UK health system.

This business plan for 2025-26 demonstrates how we will protect the public and ensure registrants can contribute to their full professional capabilities across each part of the UK. The diagram below sets out the strategy's mission, vision and key strategic objectives.





# Carrying out our statutory responsibilities

## 1. We set standards for the performance and conduct of our registrants

Last year we updated our professional standards for fully qualified and student optometrists and dispensing opticians and made consequential changes to our standards for businesses. We will develop two pieces of guidance for registrants to support them in understanding and applying the new standards. These will be on the topics of maintaining appropriate sexual boundaries and care for patients in vulnerable circumstances. We will also update our existing guidance on speaking up and begin preparations for a substantive review of our standards for business registrants.

## 2. We maintain a register of individuals who are fit to practise or train as optometrists or dispensing opticians, and bodies corporate who are fit to carry on business as optometrists or dispensing opticians

This year we expect to register around 34,000 individuals and businesses. We will also introduce a major upgrade to MyGOC, our online platform for registrants, to improve the service we provide.

## 3. We approve qualifications leading to registration

This year we will introduce new quality assurance processes to support our education and training requirements (ETR). We will also publish guidance mapping certain international qualifications against the ETR and develop processes for education providers wishing to offer qualifications for international applicants.

## 4. We investigate and act where registrants' fitness to practise, train or carry on business may be impaired

We will continue to embed improvements we have made in the delivery of our fitness to practise function, including realising the benefits of our recent investment in a digital case management system.



# Supporting the sector to provide effective eye care

In 2025-26 we expect to publish the outcomes of our annual surveys of eye care businesses, individual registrants, and the public. We use these findings to help us to track trends in the sector and we know that other organisations use them to understand the eye care workforce and patient expectations.

Our first thematic review will be on the topic of commercial practices and patient safety following concerns raised in last year's registrant survey about short testing times, overbooking clinics and sales targets. Thematic reviews involve looking at how the features of our existing regulatory system, such as standards, education/CPD, and fitness to practise are working to address the concerns identified. They also seek to understand how the system beyond regulation, including legislative and contractual requirements and self-regulation is addressing the risks.

We will administer our CPD scheme, which gives registrants the ability to tailor their learning and development to their needs, maximising their professional capability. We will capture feedback to continuously develop the scheme following the end of the 2022-24 cycle, as well as consider policy change options for the CPD scheme for 2028 onwards.

We will continue to engage with a wide range of individuals and organisations to deepen our understanding of the eye care sector, including by visiting different practices and care settings around the UK.



# Creating fairer and more inclusive eye care services and contributing to the wider healthcare agenda

We will publish the findings of our research into the lived experiences of patient and GOC registrant groups and the difficulties they face in accessing, using, or delivering eye care. We know from our research that some patient groups have worse access and experiences than others and that particular groups of registrants are more likely to experience challenging working conditions which can impact on their ability to deliver safe patient care. This research will delve more deeply into the 'lived experiences' of these groups to provide us with greater insight and understanding, which will help us and others to create fairer and more inclusive eye care services.

In 2025-2026 we expect to finalise proposals for legislative reform of business regulation. Nearly half of businesses sit outside of GOC regulation – we want to close this regulatory gap, remove unnecessary restrictions on businesses and modernise the regulatory framework. We will publish the outcome of the formal consultation on our proposals and the findings of research with patients to get their views.

We will also take forward the findings of research we commissioned last year to understand the risks of the different elements of a sight test not being carried out at the same time, by the same person and/or in the same place. We know that models of sight testing vary across the UK – there is no 'standard' model of sight test and requirements vary depending on NHS contractual requirements by nation. We will use this research to consider whether we need to update our 2013 statement on the testing of sight.



# Delivering our ambitions

We will continue our public duty and commitment to progress equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), which underpins all our work. This business plan coincides with the launch of our EDI strategy for 2025-30 to support the five-year corporate strategy. We will continue to publish an annual report covering our EDI activities both as an employer and a regulator as well as statistics on the demographic make-up of our registrants and the fairness of our regulatory decisions.

We will continue to maintain strong governance procedures, including implementing the recommendations from our Governance review, undertaking all member appointments and supporting the work of our Council and committees to ensure they inform decision-making and identify and manage any risk appropriately. We will set up a Project Delivery Unit as part of a new permanent fourth directorate to ensure our major projects are well implemented and deliver value for money. We will explore ways to strengthen the user voice in our decision-making to ensure that the needs of patients and the public lie at the heart of our regulatory approach.

We will refresh our approach to performance monitoring including by using a basket of indicators to assess progress against our three new strategic objectives. We will continue to invest in our staff with a new people strategy and a new performance behaviours framework to continue to build an engaging, inclusive culture where everyone feels valued and that they belong.

Budget 2024-25	£000 (thousands)
Income	£12,341
Expenditure	£12,325
<b>Surplus/(deficit)</b>	£16
Reserves expenditure	£1,181
<b>Surplus/(deficit)</b>	£(1,165)
Unrealised investment gains	£221
<b>Surplus/(deficit)</b>	£(994)

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