

Complaints and Feedback about the General Optical Council

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 This policy outlines how you can raise a complaint or provide feedback about the service we have provided to you. It explains how we will handle your complaint and what to expect during the process.
- 1.2 You may complain or provide feedback about GOC employees, members, workers and the Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS).

2. Policy statement

- 2.1 We are committed to responding to complaints about our service in a manner consistent with the Parliamentary Health and Social Care Ombudsman (PHSO) principles of good administration:
 - getting it right;
 - being customer focused;
 - being open and accountable;
 - acting fairly and proportionately;
 - putting things right; and
 - seeking continuous improvement.
- 2.2 We view complaints as an important and useful source of feedback about how we have performed and how we can improve in future. When things go wrong, we will acknowledge our mistakes and try to put things right. We promise that we will not treat you unfairly because you have raised a complaint with us.
- 2.3 We also welcome your feedback about things that have gone well, which we use to develop our processes and practices to continually improve.
- 2.4 Most people who contact us are responsible and display acceptable behaviour, however on rare occasions this is not the case. We accept that when contacting us to raise an issue, individuals may be distressed, frustrated or angry, however we expect to be treated in a respectful manner. We will:
 - be impartial and non-adversarial;
 - treat you politely, respectfully and considerately;
 - respect your dignity and privacy;
 - listen and respect your views;
 - always try to provide information in a way that can be understood;
 - where possible, make reasonable adjustments to our service to help you have your opinion heard; and
 - consider how your complaint or feedback can improve the GOC processes.
- 2.5 If necessary, we will use our policy, Acceptable Behaviour When Communicating with the GOC, to respond to unacceptable behaviour.

3. Scope

- 3.1 Anyone who comes into contact with our service and is unhappy or dissatisfied can complain to us.
- 3.2 A complaint is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”.
- 3.3 You may complain or provide feedback about:
- GOC employees;
 - GOC members (e.g. Council members, members of advisory committees, fitness to practise hearing members);
 - GOC workers (e.g. education visitor panel members, optometric advisers);
 - GOC contractors (e.g. external lawyers presenting hearings on our behalf); and
 - the Optical Consumer Complaints Service.
- 3.4 This policy is for raising complaints or giving feedback about:
- something that we may have done, or should have done;
 - our policies or processes (including those linked to our statutory functions and recruitment); and
 - how well we have treated you.
- 3.5 This policy is not for complaints about:
- individual registrants or optical businesses¹;
 - your glasses, contact lenses or refunds²;
 - changes to the law, government standards or guidance which we have no direct control over;
 - outcomes of fitness to practise hearings or other legal decisions³; or
 - policy positions or proposed policies under consultation. If you have a comment about our policies, then we would be happy to receive this by email and it will be considered as part of policy development.
- 3.6 If your complaint is about the Optical Consumer Complaints Service, you should firstly raise the matter with them before raising it with us, unless there is a reason that you cannot do this.
- 3.7 If your complaint is about an education provider delivering GOC-approved qualifications, you should first raise your concerns with your education provider using their formal complaints process. We won't normally consider complaints about education providers unless you have exhausted the provider's complaints process prior to approaching us, except if the issue is so serious as to merit

¹ [Raising concerns about an optician | GeneralOpticalCouncil](#)

² <https://www.opticalcomplaints.co.uk/>

³ [What is fitness to practise? | GeneralOpticalCouncil](#)

immediate referral. Complaints or concerns about a GOC-approved qualification are considered in accordance with the protocol 'Raising concerns about an education programme' described [here](#) on our website.

- 3.8 If you are not sure whether your complaint is within the scope of this policy, please tell us your concern and we will either direct you to the most appropriate team or let you know which organisations are better placed to look into your complaint.
- 3.9 If we consider your complaint to be of a very serious nature⁴, we may decide to open an internal investigation in accordance with our Investigations policy.
- 3.10 This policy is not for employees, workers or members to raise their concerns – they should use the grievance or the GOC's freedom to speak up policy.

4. How do I complain and who do I complain to?

- 4.1 You can raise your complaint to us verbally or in writing, in English or in Welsh, using the contact details at the end of this policy. We may be able to accept your complaint in a different language - please contact us to discuss your specific accessibility requirements.
- 4.2 We encourage you to raise your complaint with us as soon as possible after the incident occurs or from when you became aware of the problem. If there is a long delay between when you are aware of the problem and when you raise it, we will consider investigating it if there is good reason for the delay and it is still possible to complete a fair and effective investigation into the matter.
- 4.3 At any stage, you can send your complaint to us, as follows:
- By letter:** Corporate Complaints, General Optical Council, 10 Old Bailey, London EC4M 7NG;
- By e-mail:** corporatecomplaints@optical.org
- By phone:** 020 7307 3934
- 4.4 Our office opening hours are: Monday-Thursday 09:00-17:00 (9am-5pm) and Friday 09:00-16:45 (9am-4.45pm). We are closed between Christmas and New Year.
- 4.5 When you submit your complaint it is important that you give as much detail as possible, to help with the investigation. This can include:
- dates of relevant events;

⁴ As defined within our Investigations policy, 'serious nature' normally includes, but is not limited to: allegations of misconduct; allegations of bullying or harassment; employee or member grievances; and employee or member capability or on-going performance matters.

- any relevant background information which may help us understand and investigate your complaint (such as names of people you have been in contact with);
 - what you think has gone wrong; and
 - what you think we should do to put things right.
- 4.6 If a complaint is made anonymously, we will consider if we are able to investigate based on the information available and will try to respond where possible.
- 4.7 If you have already submitted the same or similar complaint and exhausted all our processes, we will not reconsider it without substantial new information being provided.

5. Can someone else complain on my behalf?

- 5.1 We can receive comments and complaints through someone acting on your behalf. We will ask you for confirmation that person has authority to act for you, and we will deal with them directly until we have completed the investigation into your complaint. If someone is acting on your behalf using a power of attorney, we may ask for proof that they are the attorney.
- 5.2 You can tell us at any stage if you no longer want the person to represent you.
- 5.3 If we need to obtain information held by a third party relating to your complaint, we will ask you for your permission.
- 5.4 If you need any help to make a complaint, please see annex 2 for a list of advocacy and support services.

6. How we will manage your complaint

- 6.1 We have a three-stage process for managing complaints about us:

Informal resolution by the person or department responsible for the service you are making the complaint about;

Stage one – resolution by the manager or relevant member responsible for the service you are making the complaint about; and

Stage two – if you disagree with the resolution offered at Stage one, a further review (appeal) by a manager or relevant member from elsewhere in the GOC, who is not responsible for the service you are making the complaint about.

- 6.2 At the informal resolution, and stage one and stage two, we will acknowledge your complaint within three working days. If you have contacted us by phone, we will acknowledge your complaint by phone if that is your preference. Alternatively, we will acknowledge your complaint in writing by email or by post. We prefer to use email in resolving your complaint, though you can let us know

your preference when submitting your complaint, and we will do our best to accommodate it.

- 6.3 We may need to ask you for more information before we can investigate it further. If you have a preference for how you are contacted, please let us know.
- 6.4 All our responses to complaints will explain what has happened, what has been or is being done to address the matter and when the matter should be fully resolved.
- 6.5 If you are unhappy with the response you receive, you have the option of taking your complaint to the next stage, using the steps described below.
- 6.6 If at any point we cannot meet the time scales we have set out in this policy, we will:
 - agree new time limits with you; and
 - send you details of the new deadline and explain the delay.
- 6.7 Our Governance team, who responsible for the management of complaints and oversee the process, can provide more information – you can contact them in any of the ways listed in paragraph 4.3

7. Informal resolution – try to resolve with the person/department you are in contact with

- 7.1 When a complaint is received, we will acknowledge your complaint within three working days. We may send you a summary of your complaint to check our understanding of all the points you raise. We will also tell you when you can expect a response, and we may ask you for further information to help our review of your complaint. We will resolve complaints in line with our customer care charter and service level agreements (<https://optical.org/en/about-us/customer-care-charter/>)
- 7.2 We will generally ask the person or department responsible for the service you are making the complaint about to resolve your complaint. If the person or department can offer a resolution to your complaint, they will contact you either in writing (by email or letter) or by phone, according to your preference. If they are unable to resolve your complaint, you will be given an explanation.
- 7.3 The person or department responsible for the service you are making the complaint about may decide that it is more appropriate to refer your complaint to stage one. If they decide to escalate your complaint, they will contact our Governance team, who will allocate it to an appropriate manager for review. They will let you know if they do this.

8. Stage one – try to resolve with the relevant manager

- 8.1 Your complaint may have already been referred to this stage by the person or department you are in contact with, or by our Governance team. If not, you can ask for your complaint to be looked at by a more senior manager.
- 8.2 Complaints addressed directly to the manager or relevant member responsible for the service you are making the complaint about will be allocated by our Governance team to the most appropriate manager. Where possible, we will try to ensure the person reviewing your complaint has not been directly involved in the informal resolution stage. This is to enable them to approach this with an independent view.
- 8.3 Complaints about our members will always be referred to this stage and will be considered by a Council member or independent person, as appropriate.
- 8.4 The relevant manager or member will complete a review. This may include a formal investigation, depending on the circumstances. They will aim to respond to your complaint within 20 working days from referral to this stage and will keep you updated if there is a delay.

9. Stage two – if you still disagree (appeal)

- 9.1 Stage two is the final step of our complaints procedure. If you are dissatisfied with a stage one response, you can request a review (appeal) and ask for your complaint to be reviewed by a senior manager (or Senior Council member, Chair of Council or an independent person for complaints about members). This must be submitted within 20 working days after the date of our response to you at stage one.
- 9.2 You will receive a final response within 10 working days from the day after receipt of your appeal. If your complaint requires longer than 10 working days to investigate, then we will keep you informed and set a new deadline.
- 9.3 There is no further internal appeal mechanism after this stage.
- 9.4 If you disagree with the final response, you could seek independent legal advice.

10. What could the outcome of my complaint be?

- 10.1 Once we have looked into your complaint, we will contact you to explain our findings. We will let you know what happened and if we have made any mistakes, we will acknowledge them, let you know how the situation has been or will be addressed, and the likely timescale, where appropriate.
- 10.2 Outcomes of a complaint could be:
 - upholding the complaint, in whole or in part; or
 - dismissing the complaint, in whole or in part.

- 10.3 If the complaint is upheld, we will apologise and a decision will be made on the appropriate action to resolve the complaint.
- 10.4 If the complaint is dismissed, we will explain the reasons why and what other appropriate courses of action may be available to you.
- 10.5 Where necessary, we will make changes to the GOC's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future. Even if your complaint is not upheld, we will look at whether there is room to improve based on your feedback and make any necessary changes.

11. Complaints about members

- 11.1 In the case of complaints about a member, the Head of Governance will first establish whether the complaint passes a threshold for an investigation. Complaints will not meet the threshold for investigation if:
- The subject of the complaint is no longer a member, or was not a member at the time of the alleged conduct and the issue has already been considered as part of their appointment;
 - The complaint is made anonymously, unless there is a clear public interest in doing so and the Head of Governance considers a fair investigation can be carried out;
 - The same, or substantially the same, alleged conduct has been the subject of a previous allegation and there is nothing further to be gained;
 - The complaint is essentially against the action of the Council or a committee as a whole and cannot properly be directed against an individual member;
 - The complaint is a service complaint;
 - The complaint is about conduct which is the subject of legal proceedings against the Council involving the complainant (for the avoidance of doubt in this context legal proceedings means actual or contemplated legal proceedings or matters subject to mediation in which the GOC is involved as a claimant, defendant or interested party).
 - Where a complaint identifies potential criminal conduct, the Head of Governance will refer the complaint to the police or such other regulatory agencies as may be appropriate. In most cases, the Head of Governance will take no further action until any related criminal or regulatory investigation, proceedings or processes have been concluded. There may be grounds to progress an investigation, subject to the agreement of the police or other relevant agency, and the Head of Governance will consult with them as required.
- 11.2 If the complaint does not meet the threshold, then no further action will be taken and the complainant will be informed accordingly along with the reason.

The Head of Governance will signpost the appropriate routes for complainants in the case of service complaints.

- 11.3 Where a complaint does meet the threshold, it will be referred to stage one of the process described above, and a Council member or independent person will review the complaint.
- 11.4 An annual report of any complaints received, including those that have not met this threshold, will be provided to the Nominations Committee.

12. Lessons learnt and compliance

- 12.1 We take concerns and complaints seriously and try to learn from any mistakes that we have made. Where there is a need for change or improvement, we will develop an action plan setting out what we will do and by when. We include lessons learnt in our training for employees.
- 12.2 Every quarter we report on complaints received to the Senior Management Team, the Audit, Finance and Risk Committee, and Council. We monitor timescales, outcomes, lessons learnt and action updates.
- 12.3 It is important for us to monitor that our decisions under this policy are fair and do not discriminate including on the basis of protected characteristics. If your complaint is referred to stage one of the process, the Governance team will contact you to collect information about you for this purpose. The information will be stored separately to your complaint file and will not be shared with anyone involved in investigating your complaint. Providing this information to us is optional but we encourage you to do so.
- 12.4 As part of our commitment to transparency we include summary statistics on complaints and outcomes in our annual report and accounts [INCLUDE LINK].

13. Positive experiences

- 13.1 Whilst it is important to learn from mistakes, we also learn from when things go well and recognise the contributions of our people in delivering a high-quality service.
- 13.2 If you have had a good experience of our service, our employees, members, workers, contractors, or the Optical Consumer Complaints Service, we would be very grateful to hear your feedback. We use this to give recognition to individuals and teams, and to share best practice internally to further improve our services.
- 13.3 Please send any positive feedback using the contact details below, and we will ensure that it is passed to the appropriate manager(s).

14. Reasonable adjustments

- 14.1 Should you require any reasonable adjustments to use this policy, please contact us to discuss your requirements.
- 14.2 Information will be provided in the requested format, where possible, and this can include different languages.
- 14.3 Special consideration will be given to those requesting information in a more accessible form (for example, large print or Braille).

15. Protecting your data

- 15.1 Any information you supply will be stored and processed by us in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. Our privacy statement can be found [here](#).
- 15.2 All of your complaint correspondence and supporting documents will be scanned and saved securely on our computer system.
- 15.3 Your complaint file will be retained in accordance with our retention schedule, after which it will be confidentially destroyed. Should you wish for your personal information related to the complaint to be deleted prior to this, please contact IG@optical.org.

Contacting us

At any stage, you can contact us, by one of the following:

By letter: Corporate Complaints, General Optical Council, 10 Old Bailey, London EC4M 7NG;

By e-mail: corporatecomplaints@optical.org

By phone: 020 7307 3934

Annex 1: Advocacy and Support Services

Advocacy Services

For further information about advocacy services available in the UK please see: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/Pages/advocacy-services.aspx>

Civil Legal Aid

A free, confidential and impartial advice service paid for by legal aid - for information on where to find your local face-to-face legal advice provider.

[Civil Legal Advice \(CLA\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Citizens Advice

A free, confidential and impartial advice service with lots of online information as well as a face-to-face service.

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk>

Samaritans

The Samaritans provide a free and confidential listening service, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. They do not provide advice nor do they report your concerns onwards, but sometimes just having someone to talk to that isn't family or friends can be a tremendous help. For more information of what to expect when you contact the Samaritans, visit: <http://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help-you/what-happens-when-you-contact-us>

Contact the Samaritans on: jo@samaritans.org

Phone: 116 123 (UK)

Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care (PSA)

The body responsible for overseeing the health and care regulators (including the GOC) who regulate health and care professionals to make sure they are protecting patients and service users properly.

<https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/share-your-experience>

Annex 2: Complaints about member recruitment

1. We work hard to ensure that our member recruitment processes are fair, transparent and based on merit. However, if you are concerned about the process used in our recruitment campaigns, you can submit a complaint at any stage of the process, including after you have been notified of the outcome.
2. Complaints about our member recruitment processes are managed in accordance with our policy. Complaints about the process will be referred to the Governance team for the informal stage.
3. Complaints regarding the final outcome of a member recruitment will automatically be referred to stage one of the policy. Your complaint will be reviewed by a member who is independent from the specific recruitment campaign.
4. You will receive a response within five working days from the date after receipt of your complaint. The possible outcomes are:
 - a. Your complaint is upheld: there was a flaw with the appointment process and it will be necessary to rectify this.
 - b. Your complaint is partially upheld: there was an issue with the information you received, or the way your application was considered. However, this would not have impacted the outcome of the appointment decision. We will proceed with the decision, take learning from this situation and set out what we will do differently in the future when providing our response to you.
 - c. Your complaint is not upheld: the matter was dealt with in a manner consistent with the policies and processes of the GOC.
5. There is no stage two appeal process for complaints relating to an appointment. However, you can complain to the Privy Council in the event you are dissatisfied with the response. The Professional Standards Authority covers the information you will need to consider in section 17 of its [guidance on member recruitment](#). You can find the contact details of the Privy Council [here](#).