



# Standards for Optical Students

effective from April 2016

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Our standards define the standards of behaviour and performance we expect of all registered student optometrists and student dispensing opticians.

## **The General Optical Council**

The General Optical Council is the regulator for the optical professions with statutory responsibility for setting standards for optical students.

This document sets out the eighteen standards that you must meet whilst training as an optical professional. These standards are not listed in order of priority and include standards relating to your behaviour and your supervised practice.

You are professionally responsible for what you do or do not do. You must use your own professional judgement, with the support of your training provider or supervisor, to determine how to achieve these standards. To help you in doing so, we have provided additional information about what we expect of you under each standard. In relation to a small number of standards we may produce supplementary material where we feel that registrants need additional support.

## **Your role as a professional**

As a student training to become a registered healthcare professional, you have a responsibility to ensure the care and safety of your patients and the public and to uphold professional standards.

Throughout the course of your training you will develop the knowledge and skills needed to be able to exercise professional judgement and make decisions about the care of your patient.

In the early stages of your training you will receive a greater level of support from your tutors and supervisors to assist your decision making. As you become more competent and experienced you will be required to take on increased responsibility for your decisions and professional judgements.

## **Requirement to be registered throughout your period of study**

It is a requirement for all students enrolled on a General Optical Council-accredited course in optometry or dispensing optics to be registered throughout their period of training and to follow the standards outlined in this document.

## **Consequences of not registering or following the standards**

If someone raises concerns about your fitness to train, we will refer to these standards when deciding if we need to take any action.

You will need to demonstrate that your behaviour was in line with these standards and that you have acted professionally and in the best interests of your patients. We will apply these standards in the context of the stage of training you have reached, taking into account the level of support and guidance you have received from those supervising your training.

Failure to register or follow these standards as a student, may affect your ability to register and practise as an optical professional when you qualify. In serious cases you may also be removed from your training course.

## **Making the care of your patients your first and overriding concern**

The care, well-being and safety of patients are at the heart of being a professional. Patients will often have the same expectations of students as they would of qualified healthcare professionals and they must always be your first concern from the beginning of your study, through to your pre-registration training and beyond.

We have therefore produced these specific standards for optical students which can be applied in the context of your study, taking account of the fact that you will develop your knowledge, skills and judgement over the period of your training.

Once your training is complete and you register as a practising optical professional you will then be expected to meet the separate Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians.

## The standards

As a student optometrist or student dispensing optician you must:

- 1 Listen to patients and ensure that they are at the heart of the decisions made about their care
- 2 Communicate effectively with your patients
- 3 Obtain valid consent
- 4 Show care and compassion for your patients
- 5 Recognise, and work within, your limits of competence
- 6 Conduct appropriate assessments, examinations, treatments and referrals under supervision
- 7 Maintain adequate patient records
- 8 Ensure that supervision is undertaken appropriately and complies with the law
- 9 Work collaboratively with your peers, tutors, supervisors or other colleagues in the interests of patients

- 10 Protect and safeguard patients, colleagues and others from harm
- 11 Ensure a safe environment for your patients
- 12 Show respect and fairness to others and do not discriminate
- 13 Maintain confidentiality and respect your patients' privacy
- 14 Maintain appropriate boundaries with others
- 15 Be honest and trustworthy
- 16 Do not damage the reputation of your profession through your conduct
- 17 Respond to complaints effectively
- 18 Be candid when things have gone wrong

You will need to use your professional judgement in deciding how to meet the standards. To help you in doing so, the next section provides more detail about what we expect of you in relation to each standard.

**1. Listen to patients and ensure that they are at the heart of the decisions made about their care**

- 1.1 Give patients your full attention and allow sufficient time to deal properly with their needs.
- 1.2 Listen to patients and in conjunction with your tutor or supervisor take account of their views, preferences and concerns, responding honestly and appropriately to their questions or referring to your tutor or supervisor for advice.
- 1.3 Assist patients in exercising their rights and making informed decisions about their care. Respect the choices they make.
- 1.4 Treat patients as individuals and respect their dignity and privacy. This includes a patient's right to confidentiality.

- 1.5 Where possible, in consultation with your tutor or supervisor, modify your care and treatment based on your patient's needs and preferences without compromising patient safety.
- 1.6 Consider all information provided by your patients, including where they have undertaken research in advance of the consultation. Explain clearly if the information is not valid or relevant. Work in consultation with your tutor or supervisor to achieve this.
- 1.7 Encourage patients to ask questions and take an active part in the decisions made about their treatment, prescription and aftercare.
- 1.8 In conjunction with your tutor or supervisor, support patients in caring for themselves, including giving advice on the effects of life choices and lifestyle on their health and well-being and supporting them in making lifestyle changes where appropriate.

## **2. Communicate effectively with your patients**

- 2.1 Give patients information in a way they can understand. Work with your tutor to achieve this.
- 2.2 Ensure your patients know in advance what to expect from the consultation, giving them the opportunity to ask questions or change their mind before proceeding.
- 2.3 Be alert to unspoken signals which could indicate a patient's lack of understanding, discomfort or lack of consent.
- 2.4 Develop and use appropriate communication skills to communicate effectively with patients and their carers, colleagues and others. Consult your tutor or supervisor when unsure of how to proceed.
- 2.5 Ensure that patients or their carers have all the information they need to safely use, administer or look after optical devices, drugs or other treatment that has been prescribed or they have been directed to use in order to manage their eye conditions. This includes being actively shown how to use any of the above.
- 2.6 Be sensitive and supportive when dealing with relatives or other people close to the patient.

## **3. Obtain valid consent**

- 3.1 Obtain valid consent before examining a patient, providing treatment or involving patients in teaching and research activities. For consent to be valid it must be given:
  - 3.1.1 Voluntarily.
  - 3.1.2 By the patient or someone authorised to act on the patient's behalf.
  - 3.1.3 By a person with the capacity to consent.
  - 3.1.4 By an appropriately informed person. Informed means explaining what you are going to do and ensuring that patients are aware of any risks and options in terms of examination, treatment, sale or supply of optical appliances or research they are participating in. This includes the right of the patient to refuse treatment or have a chaperone or interpreter present.
- 3.2 Be aware of your legal obligations in relation to consent, including the differences in the provision of consent for children, young people and vulnerable adults. When in a nation of the UK other than where you normally study or undertake supervised practice, be aware of any differences in consent law and apply these appropriately.
- 3.3 Ensure that the patient's consent remains valid at each stage of the examination or treatment and during any research in which they are participating.

#### **4. Show care and compassion for your patients**

- 4.1 Treat others with dignity, and show empathy and respect.
- 4.2 Respond with humanity and kindness to circumstances where patients, their family or carers may experience pain, distress or anxiety.

#### **5. Recognise, and work within, your limits of competence**

- 5.1 Recognise the limits of your scope of training including your knowledge, skills and experience.
- 5.2 Be able to identify when you need to refer to your tutor or supervisor for further advice and guidance.
- 5.3 Understand and comply with the requirements of student registration with the General Optical Council and the legal obligations of undertaking any restricted functions.

## **6. Conduct appropriate assessments, examinations, treatments and referrals under supervision**

You will develop your clinical skills over the course of your training, becoming more proficient as you near the end of your studies. As part of your training, you will apply these clinical skills in a real-life setting under the direction of your tutor or supervisor gradually taking more responsibility for patients as your skills develop. In conjunction with your tutor or supervisor:

- 6.1 Conduct an adequate assessment for the purposes of the optical consultation including, where necessary, any relevant medical, family and social history. This may include current symptoms, personal beliefs or cultural factors.
- 6.2 Provide or arrange any further examinations, advice, investigations or treatment if required for your patient. This should be done in a timescale that does not compromise patient safety and care.

- 6.3 Only prescribe optical devices, drugs, or treatment when you have adequate knowledge of the patient's health.
- 6.4 Check that the care and treatment you provide for each patient is compatible with any other treatments the patient is receiving, including (where possible) over-the-counter medications.
- 6.5 Provide effective patient care and treatments based on current good practice.
- 6.6 Only provide or recommend examinations, treatments, drugs or optical devices if these are clinically justified, and in the best interests of the patient.
- 6.7 When in doubt, consult with your tutor or supervisor appropriately for advice on assessment, examination, treatment and other aspects of patient care, bearing in mind the need for patient confidentiality.



## **7. Maintain adequate patient records**

- 7.1 Maintain clear, legible and contemporaneous patient records which are accessible for all those involved in the patient's care.
- 7.2 As a minimum, record the following information:
  - 7.2.1 The date of the consultation.
  - 7.2.2 Your patient's personal details.
  - 7.2.3 The reason for the consultation and any presenting condition.
  - 7.2.4 The details and findings of any assessment or examination conducted.
  - 7.2.5 The treatment, referral or advice you provided, including any drugs or optical device prescribed or a copy of the referral letter.
  - 7.2.6 Consent obtained for any examination or treatment.
  - 7.2.7 Details of all those involved in the optical consultation, including name and signature or other identification of the author. This includes details of your supervisor including name and GOC registration number.

## **8. Ensure that supervision is undertaken appropriately and complies with the law**

The responsibility to ensure that supervision does not compromise patient care and safety is shared between the supervisor and the trainee. When being supervised:

- 8.1 You must only be supervised by someone who is approved by your employer or training provider.
- 8.2 Ensure that your supervisor is on the premises, in a position to oversee the work you undertake and is ready to intervene if necessary in order to protect patients.
- 8.3 Your supervisor retains clinical responsibility for the patient.
- 8.4 Comply with all legal requirements governing the activity.

**9. Work collaboratively with your peers, tutors, supervisors or other colleagues in the interests of patients**

- 9.1 Work collaboratively with your peers, tutors, supervisors, other colleagues within the optical professions and other health and social care practitioners in the best interests of your patients, ensuring that your communication is clear and effective.
- 9.2 Ensure that patient information is shared appropriately with others, and clinical records are accessible by all involved in the patient's care.
- 9.3 Where disagreements occur between yourself, your tutor, peers or other colleagues, ensure that these do not impact on patient care and aim to resolve these for the benefit of the patient.



## **10. Protect and safeguard patients, colleagues and others from harm**

10.1 Protect and safeguard children, young people and vulnerable adults from abuse.

You must:

10.1.1 Be alert to signs of abuse and denial of rights.

10.1.2 Consider the needs and welfare of your patients.

10.1.3 Report concerns to an appropriate person or organisation, whether this is your tutor, supervisor or training provider.

10.1.4 Act quickly in order to prevent further risk of harm. Seek advice immediately if you are unsure of how to proceed.

10.1.5 Keep adequate notes on what has happened and what actions you took.

10.2 Promptly raise concerns about your patients, peers, colleagues, tutor, supervisor, training provider or other organisation, if patient or public safety might be at risk and encourage others to do the same. Concerns should be raised with your supervisor, training provider or the General Optical Council as appropriate. This is sometimes referred to as 'whistle-blowing' and certain aspects of this are protected by law.

10.3 If you have concerns about your own fitness to practise, whether due to issues with health, character, behaviour, judgement or any other matter that may damage the reputation of your profession, do not participate in any further clinical training and seek advice from your training provider immediately.

10.4 If patients are at risk because of inadequate premises, equipment, resources, employment policies or systems, put the matter right if that is possible and/or raise a concern with your training provider.

10.5 Ensure that when reporting concerns, you take account of your obligations to maintain confidentiality as outlined in standard 13.

## **11. Ensure a safe environment for your patients**

- 11.1 Ensure that a safe environment is provided to deliver care to your patients, and take appropriate action if this is not the case (see standard 10), by raising your concerns with your training provider. In particular:
  - 11.1.1 Be aware of and comply with health and safety legislation.
  - 11.1.2 Ensure that the environment and equipment that you use is hygienic.
  - 11.1.3 Ensure that equipment that you use has been appropriately maintained.
  - 11.1.4 Follow the regulations on substances hazardous to health.
  - 11.1.5 Dispose of controlled, clinical and offensive materials in an appropriate manner.
  - 11.1.6 Minimise the risk of infection by following appropriate infection controls including hand hygiene.

- 11.2 In an emergency, take appropriate action to provide care, taking into account your competence and other available options. You must:
  - 11.2.1 Use your professional judgement to assess the urgency of the situation.
  - 11.2.2 Provide any care that is within your scope of training which will provide benefit for the patient.
  - 11.2.3 Make your best efforts to refer or signpost the patient to a healthcare professional or source of care where appropriate.

## **12. Show respect and fairness to others and do not discriminate**

- 12.1 Respect a patient's dignity, showing politeness and consideration.
- 12.2 Promote equality, value diversity and be inclusive in all your dealings. Do not discriminate on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief.
- 12.3 Ensure that your own religious, moral, political or personal beliefs and values do not prejudice patients' care. If these prevent you from providing a service, ensure that you consult with your tutor, supervisor or training provider to make alternative arrangements.
- 12.4 Respect peers' and colleagues' skills and contributions and do not discriminate.
- 12.5 Refrain from making unnecessary or disparaging comments about your peers, tutors, supervisors, training provider or other colleagues which could make a patient doubt their competence, skills or fitness to practise, either in public or private. If you have concerns about a colleague's fitness to practise or the performance of your training provider or placement, then please refer to standard 10.

- 12.6 Consider and respond to the needs of disabled patients and make reasonable adjustments in conjunction with your tutor, supervisor or training provider to accommodate these and improve access to optical care.
- 12.7 Challenge your peers if their behaviour is discriminatory and be prepared to report behaviour that amounts to abuse or denial of a patient's or colleague's rights, or could undermine patient safety.



### **13. Maintain confidentiality and respect your patients' privacy**

- 13.1 Keep confidential all information about patients in compliance with the law, including information which is handwritten, digital, visual, audio or retained in your memory.
- 13.2 Maintain confidentiality when communicating publicly, including speaking to or writing in the media, or writing online including on social media.
- 13.3 Co-operate with formal inquiries and investigations and provide all relevant information that is requested in line with your obligations to patient confidentiality.

- 13.4 Provide an appropriate level of privacy for your patients during consultation to ensure that the process of information gathering, examination and treatment remain confidential. Different patients will require different levels of privacy and their preferences must be taken into account.
- 13.5 Only use the patient information you collect for the purposes it was given, or where you are required to share it by law.
- 13.6 Securely store and protect your patient records to prevent loss, theft and inappropriate disclosure, in accordance with data protection law as outlined in the policies of your training provider.
- 13.7 Confidentially dispose of patient records when no longer required in line with data protection requirements.

## **14. Maintain appropriate boundaries with others**

- 14.1 Maintain proper professional boundaries with your patients, students and others that you come into contact with during the course of your professional training and take special care when dealing with vulnerable people.
- 14.2 Never abuse your professional position to exploit or unduly influence your patients or the public, whether politically, financially, sexually or by other means which serve your own interest.

## **15. Be honest and trustworthy**

- 15.1 Act with honesty and integrity to maintain public trust and confidence in your profession.
- 15.2 Avoid or manage any conflicts of interest which might affect your professional judgement. If appropriate, declare an interest, withdraw yourself from the conflict and decline gifts and hospitality.
- 15.3 Ensure that incentives, targets and similar factors do not affect your professional judgement. Do not allow personal or commercial interests and gains to compromise patient care.
- 15.4 Ensure that you do not make false or misleading statements when describing your individual knowledge, experience, expertise and specialties, including by the use of titles.
- 15.5 Be honest in your financial and commercial dealings and give patients clear information about the costs of your professional services and products before they commit to buying.
- 15.6 Do not make misleading, confusing or unlawful statements within your communications.

## **16. Do not damage the reputation of your profession through your conduct**

- 16.1 Ensure that your conduct, whether or not connected to your professional study does not damage public confidence in you or your profession.
- 16.2 Ensure your conduct in the online environment particularly in relation to social media, whether or not connected to your professional study, does not damage public confidence in you or your profession.
- 16.3 Be aware of and comply with the law and all the requirements of the General Optical Council.

## **17. Respond to complaints effectively**

- 17.1 Follow the complaints system that your training provider has in place, making patients aware of their opportunities to complain to yourself or your training provider. At the appropriate stage in the process, the patient should also be informed of their rights to complain to the General Optical Council or to seek mediation through the Optical Consumer Complaints Service as appropriate.
- 17.2 Respect a patient's right to complain and ensure that the making of a complaint does not prejudice patient care.
- 17.3 Respond honestly, openly, politely and constructively to anyone who complains and apologise where appropriate.
- 17.4 Provide any information that a complainant might need to progress a complaint including your General Optical Council registration details.



## **18. Be candid when things have gone wrong**

18.1 Be open and honest with your patients when you have identified that things have gone wrong with their treatment or care which has resulted in them suffering harm or distress or where there may be implications for future patient care, seeking advice from your tutor or supervisor on how to proceed. They will advise on whether further action is required such as:

18.1.1 Telling the patient (or, where appropriate, the patient's advocate, carer or family) that something has gone wrong.

18.1.2 Offering an apology.

18.1.3 Offering appropriate remedy or support to put matters right (if possible).

18.1.4 Explaining fully and promptly what has happened and the likely short-term and long-term effects.

18.1.5 Outlining what you will do, where possible, to prevent reoccurrence and improve future patient care.

18.2 Be open and honest with your supervisor or training provider and take part in reviews and investigations when requested and with the General Optical Council, raising concerns where appropriate. Support and encourage your peers to be open and honest, and not stop someone from raising concerns.

18.3 Ensure that when things go wrong, you reflect on what happened and use the experience to improve.

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