



Optical Consumer Complaints Service

Annual Report 2008

THE OCCS OBJECTIVES ARE:

- ❖ To be easily accessible to patients and practitioners by presenting its services as widely as possible in a user-friendly way.
- ❖ To resolve complaints as swiftly as possible following full consultation with the parties involved.
- ❖ To be impartial and to be seen to be so in the investigation and resolution of complaints.
- ❖ To have fair procedures, supported by expert advice, in the conduct of a mediation process.
- ❖ To be effective and efficient in its use of resources.
- ❖ To be publicly accountable by publishing an annual report.
- ❖ To make a contribution to the encouragement of high standards in the optical professions by drawing attention in the Annual Report to any significant matters which emerge from the work of the OCCS; and maintaining close liaison with the professions, their representatives and consumer bodies to promote the interests of all parties who might wish to use the service.

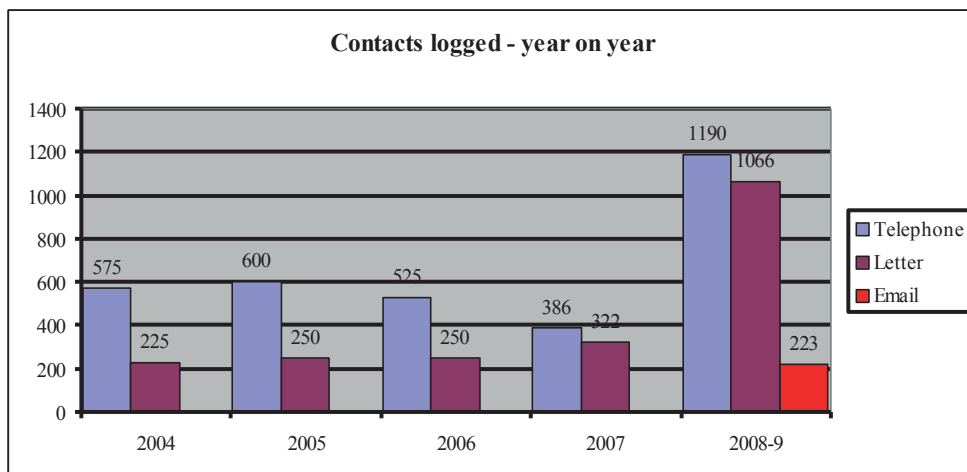
COMPLAINTS STATISTICS 2008

The statistics recorded and published previously have been in respect of the OCCS accounting year, which was the calendar year. As the current contract with the GOC runs from the 1st April 2008, the OCCS Management Committee decided to change the OCCS accounting year to the contract year. Thus, the statistics published for 2008 are in respect of the months April 2008 to March 2009. Also, it was decided to record the details of all contact by complainants, so that the statistics included those whose complaint was resolved without the need to open a case file, e.g. where the complainant was satisfied by an explanation or after guidance on how to proceed. Thus, although not all contacts proceed as a formal complaint, since the new contract (April 2008) we have logged all contacts by telephone, letter and email as well as the number of new cases opened. This means that exact comparison with previous years indicated cannot be made, but a reasonable indication of trend is shown and it is clear that the service is dealing with an increasing caseload.

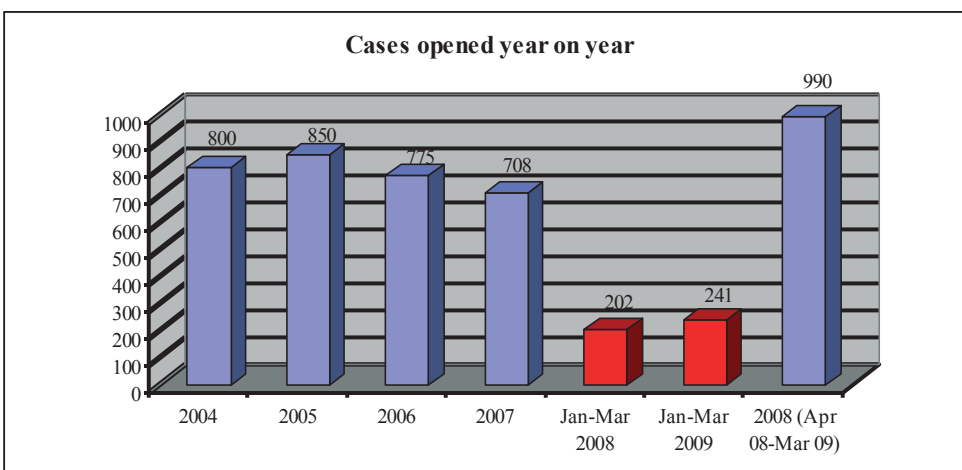
In the year April 2008 to March 2009, we logged 2479 contacts of which 1066 (43%) were by letter, 223 (9%) by email and 1190 (48%) by telephone. The logging of contacts monitors the workload of the service and although the majority were satisfied with information, or guidance on how to proceed, 990 new cases were opened. This is a 35% increase on the number of complaints received in 2007. It is not considered that this means a deterioration in standards but is due to an improvement in the recording of contacts with the public and practices and a widening awareness of the OCCS and the service offered. The latter is evident from the increase in the number of complainants learning of the OCCS through the website and our service being more clearly established with public offices such as trading standards and Consumer Direct.

Contacts logged year on year

Separating out those handled verbally over the telephone and those by letter or as from 2008-9 by email.



Cases opened year on year



Cases opened year on year

The statistics for 2008 are collected on a different basis. For comparison with previous calendar years, the table includes in red the first quarter of 2007, which is included in the 2007 figures; and the first quarter of 2008, which is omitted from the figure for 2008 as the statistical period is now the contract year - (see above).



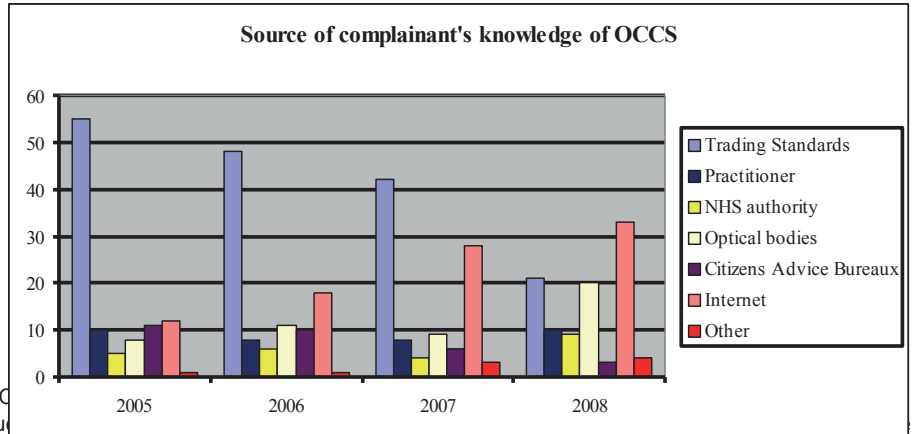
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SOURCE OF COMPLAINANTS' KNOWLEDGE OF OCCS

- 33% Internet
- 21% Trading Standards
- 20% Optical Bodies
- 10% Optical Practitioner
- 9% NHS Authority
- 3% Citizens Advice Bureau
- 4% Other

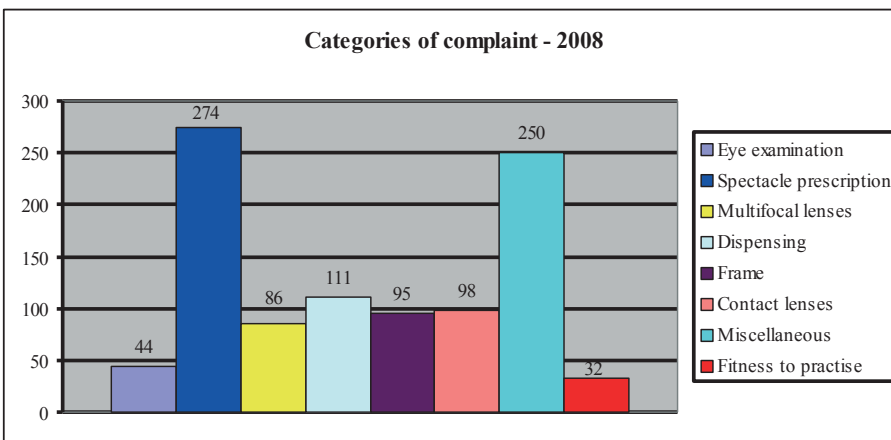
The above percentages show that the Internet has replaced Trading Standards as the principal source of complainants' knowledge of the OCCS and accounts for a third of the references to us. The Optical Bodies, principally the General Council of Opticians, are the third source of introduction to the OCCS and



shows a significant increase in 2008. The percentage of references by a practitioner has not varied greatly over the years and, as has been referred to elsewhere in this report, includes increased reference by practitioners wishing to discuss complaints made to them. The term 'NHS Authority' includes complainants referred to the OCCS by a primary care trust or Consumer Direct.

The public is increasingly using the world wide web to search for help and the OCCS website is frequently visited and the number of contacts after visiting the site has increased year on year. The Annual Report and the Authorisation Form, which we require from a consumer before considering a complaint, can be downloaded from our website at: www.opticalcomplaints.co.uk. We believe that all relevant organisations are aware of the service provided by the OCCS but further information can be supplied on request.

REASON FOR COMPLAINT



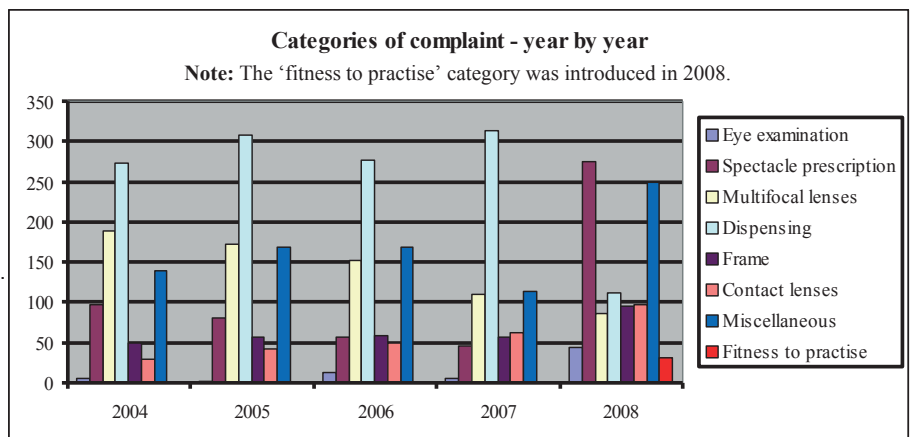
The OCCS endeavours to categorise complaints in order to identify trends, but categorisation cannot be precise as a complaint may fall into more than a single category. Also, it is not always possible to identify the main cause of complaint before a case is nearly resolved, e.g. when the sight test and dispensing are at different practices. 4.4% of the complaints in 2008 related to the sight test and over a quarter of all complaints (27.7%) were regarding the prescriptions issued - the most common single cause of complaint. In some of these cases, it later transpired that the error was in the dispensing of the prescription. 11.2% of complaints clearly revealed errors in dispensing to patients, but this percentage is an improvement on previous years.

Miscellaneous complaints comprised 25.3% of all

complaints and included allegations of rudeness; refusal to supply a prescription and/or contact lens specification; refusal to test sight if the prescription was to be taken elsewhere for dispensing; and queries about costs and pricing, especially confusion over 'bogof' offers.

Criticism of multifocal lenses accounts for 8.7% of all complaints. This is a significant reduction on previous years but continues to be a frequent reason for complaint. The patient may be unable to adapt, but often it is because there has been insufficient attention by the optician to explaining the wearing of such lenses, especially having regard to the patient's lifestyle.

9.9% of complaints concern contact lenses, which is an increase over previous years. The majority of these complaints are either the practice's charging policy or procedure and/or refusal or delay in providing a specification. We urge practices to ensure that their charging policies and procedures are clear and explained to patients; and also, that direct debit or standing order management is properly maintained. We cannot support the improper withholding of specifications and the law must be observed. Unjustifiable failure to provide a specification or prescription is reported to the GOC. Other complaints by contact lens wearers are few, probably because after-care is built into the contact lens wear system so that problems are usually picked up in the practice.



Note: The 'fitness to practise' category was introduced in 2008.