



## Introduction

By the Chairman of the Independent Committee of Management.

This report relates to the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011, which is the last year of our initial contract with the General Optical Council, but the GOC exercised its option to extend the contract period for a further two years to the 31 March 2013 and so we are pleased to continue our service.

Our intention is to carry on developing the service we offer the public and the optical practices at a time when many changes are apparent and having an effect in the delivery of the services provided to the public.

We seek to provide a service to complainants, the professionals and their representative bodies that is effective and in step with today's demands, and which recognises the pressures, challenges and influences of competition and the marketing of goods and services in a time of economic restraint.

The work of the OCCS is monitored by the Independent Committee of Management which receives the statistics of contacts and complaints at regular intervals and also the reports of visits to the office. Each of the four lay members on the Committee has the opportunity to visit the office and observe the way in which staff deal with telephone calls, and he/she is able to select case files at random to review how complaints have been handled and to discuss cases. Visits are at quarterly intervals and a written report of the visit is circulated to the Committee.

This monitoring process is not only to satisfy the Committee that the service is operating satisfactorily and to the required standard, but is to confirm that the OCCS is operating independently and without prejudice in the mediation of the complaints received. In the last two years, a visit has also been made by an optician member of the Committee so that a professional can review firsthand the operation of the service.

We maintain close liaison and working relationships with independent and corporate practices and the optical

bodies serving the professions, while retaining our own independence in dealing with consumer complaints. We will continue to take every suitable opportunity to promote and develop our service and maintain an independent but significant relationship with consumers and practices alike.

We note from the complaints received over the year that there have been instances of professional standards being affected by pressure to meet targets, resulting in reduced attention to customer needs and reluctance to remedy any defects. It needs to be remembered that the testing of sight and the supply of spectacles or contact lenses is part of a health service, whether financed in part by the NHS or not.

Occasionally we have seen a conflict between 'commercial' and 'professional' interests when the motivation in a practice has been more to meet a sales target than to provide the most suitable eyewear for the patient. We have also noted an increase in 'internet dispensing', which we feel unable to support as being in the best interest the public; and, of course, we are unable to accept a complaint relating to an unregistered supplier.

As will be seen from the summary of accounts in this report, we have again been able to end the financial year in a strong position, which has been achieved by continuing economies in our operation not least of which is the

relocation of our office out of London. The OCCS is not a profit-making exercise but we run our service in a business like way to reduce as much as possible the cost to the GOC and – therefore – the registrants.

We have to maintain a fully funded OCCS service, able to deal with any legal or consumer eventuality which may arrive in today's changing environment. Unfortunately, our contract is of limited duration and it is the policy of the Management Committee to maintain a reserve to provide for contingencies and the financial implications of the dissolution of the OCCS in the event of our tender for a further contract not being successful.

We hosted a wide ranging "Complaints Service" Seminar in October 2010, which was an occasion that offered all those in a position to receive or advise on complaints about opticians' services the opportunity to share current experience and best practice.

A report and full transcript can be viewed or downloaded from the OCCS website at: [www.opticalcomplaints.co.uk/occs/conferencetranscript2010.pdf](http://www.opticalcomplaints.co.uk/occs/conferencetranscript2010.pdf)

David Burt

Chairman