

OPTICAL CONSUMER COMPLAINTS SERVICE

Position Statement

April 2011

1. The current contract with the GOC was for a period of three years from the 1 April 2008 and terminates on the 31 March 2011 but the GOC exercised its option to extend the contract for a further period not exceeding two years, i.e. to the 31 March 2013. The GOC is obliged to invite tenders for a new contract and it is expected that tenders will be invited towards the end of 2012.

The contract provides for annual review of the GOC payment to the OCCS and for adjustment of the payment according to the latest Retail Price Index. The next review is due March 2010 with any adjustment due with effect from 1 April 2010. The annual payment is made by standing order, monthly in arrears.

2. The OCCS is incorporated as a private company limited by guarantee and the directors are the 'lay' members and one of the opticians nominated to the membership by the ABDO, AOP, BCO and FODO respectively. The overall management and supervision of the OCCS is delegated by the directors to the Independent Committee of Management (ICM), which currently comprises three 'lay' members and five 'specialist' members. 'Lay' members are those elected members who have no association or connection with optics or opticians. The 'specialist' members are the nominated opticians and an elected member with special knowledge and experience of consumer issues.

The ICM currently has a minority of lay members but the Board of Directors, which is the final arbiter as the manager of the company and its business, has a majority.

3. Contact by consumers with the OCCS by correspondence, email and telephone is recorded and statistics produced on a monthly basis. The purpose of the statistics is to monitor volume of business, performance and type of complaint and issues involved.

4. The OCCS service is essentially a mediation service which relies on an informed and independent assessment of the facts and issues involved in a complaint and a commitment to an objective of discussing and reaching a solution or compromise acceptable to the consumer and practitioner. It is important for the OCCS to have the confidence and respect of the consumers and practitioners and to demonstrate its independence. Day to day response to all contacts and the relationship with consumers, practitioners and those bodies that represent them, or have responsibility for their interests, are important factors in developing that confidence, respect and independence.

5. Complaints often include elements or issues that are not of a contractual nature and not within the remit of consumer legislation, e.g. where there is an element of fitness to practise. In such cases, all or some of the issues involved are outside the remit of the OCCS. As the OCCS has no power to act outside its remit, such cases are rejected unless it is possible to deal with the consumer issues without involvement in issues outside the remit. In all such cases, the complainant is informed of the GOC as the body responsible for dealing with fitness to practise matters; and if the case is accepted as a complaint for OCCS action, it is made clear that the OCCS cannot be concerned with aspects of fitness to practise.

Complaints relating to services or goods provided by suppliers, who are not practitioners registered with the GOC, are not accepted and complainants are referred to trading standards; and to the GOC if it appears that the law has been contravened.

6. An annual report is produced and distributed mainly to the profession and a copy placed on the website (www.opticalcomplaints.co.uk) for download.

Strategic Plan

No.	Objective	Strategy
1.0	Continue successful contracting from GOC	[1] Pursue agreement to 2 year extension. [2] Prepare for tender procedure in 2011/2013. [3] Represent to GOC that when tenders invited, a contract period of 10 years, determinable on 1 year's notice, should be considered.
2.0	Maintaining independence	[1] Maintain structure & membership of Board & ICM. [2] Ensure ICM majority of members not involved in, or associated with, optics. [3] Preserve operational independence from GOC.
3.0	Managing volume of complaints	[1] Continue to record statistical data. [2] Monitor statistics and staff workload. [3] Appoint part-time staff if workload justifies.
4.0	Working together with organisations, practitioners and complainants	[1] Maintain an open and receptive manner in all contact. [2] Promote the OCCS service when opportune. [3] Encourage working relationship with optical bodies. [4] Seek opportunity to attend relevant meeting, seminars, conferences, etc. where opticians are present.
4.1	Developing and continuing good working relationships in complaints handling	[1] Maintain & develop good communication with ABDO, AOP, BCO, FODO & GOC. [2] Ensure high standard of communication with complainants; providing staff training as required.
4.2	Increase publicity of OCCS in the profession and the public	[1] Consider specialist advice on means and content of active publicity & promotion of OCCS service. [2] Consider discussions with optical bodies on possibility of securing that practitioners include details of OCCS service in individual practice procedures. [3] Maintain and develop the website for relevant information and guidance.

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No.	Objective	Strategy
4.3	Continue as a 'sounding board' for practitioners in complaints handling	[1] Promote through optical bodies the concept that practitioners are welcome to discuss complaints received by them with OCCS. [2] Through annual report and all available other means to encourage practitioners to consult with OCCS on complaints.
4.4	Ensuring links with PCT's, in complaints handling / private NHS interface	[1] Develop communication with PCTs and Consumer Direct.
5.0	Handling commercial and professional dual complaints	[1] Continue to reject complaints that relate to fitness to practise with little or no consumer issues; but refer complainant to GOC.[2] Pursue with GOC means of interaction between OCCS & GOC when complaint includes 'significant' element of fitness to practise.
5.1	Reporting on issues arising from unregistered practices/internet suppliers	[1] Provide complainant with guidance on reference to trading standards and/or Consumer Direct. [2] Refer to GOC issues that appear to contravene the law relating to optical practice.
6.0	Providing an Annual Report on the issues and activities etc of OCCS.	[1] Continue production of Annual Report and develop content and distribution.

As at 6 April 2011

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