



Optical Consumer
Complaints Service

Customer Care at the Heart of Optics

2014 - 2015



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What does OCCS do?

The Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS) is an independent and free mediation service for consumers (patients) of optical care and the professionals providing that care. The service is funded by the General Optical Council who regulate opticians, optometrists and dispensing opticians.


All opticians and optometry practices will have their own internal complaints procedure to deal with any complaints raised by consumers. Most concerns are normally resolved informally. If a consumer and the practitioner cannot resolve the complaint, either can refer the complaint to the Optical Consumer Complaints Service. We will then investigate the complaint and help to find a resolution.

“

I would highly recommend anyone who is having difficulty in resolving a complaint to seek advice from OCCS


”

Meet the Team




Jennie Jones

Jennie leads the OCCS Team and spearheads engagement with consumer groups, stakeholders and optical professionals to ensure the experience and insight of the OCCS is reinvested to improve individual consumer experience.




Richard Edwards

Richard provides consultancy advice to the OCCS, bringing a wealth of experience of the optical profession from his previous role as an Optometrist and more recently has spent over 15 years with Boots Opticians at a senior level. Richard's role provides the OCCS with further insight into optical complaints across the UK.




Fiona Spinks

Fiona is part of the OCCS Senior Mediating Team. Fiona's background as a Solicitors Regulation Authority practice standards adjudicator, and her experience and skills as an independent complaints assessor and resolution manager enable her to provide a balanced and effective approach to complaints resolution.




Jayne Kendrick-Jones

Jayne is part of the OCCS Senior Mediating Team. Jayne's experience at reviewing complaints and procedures, combined with over 10 years' complaints resolution experience, are put to good use for consumer and practitioners by resolving the more complex and highly disputed complaints.



Lorraine Harvey

Lorraine is a Complaint Resolution Manager with 15 years' experience in optical practices across North London and Hertfordshire. Lorraine is a trained counsellor and combines her practical knowledge in optics with her mediating and resolution experience to great effect.



Claire Ball

Claire is a Complaint Resolution Manager and works with Lorraine to provide caring, objective and efficient mediation alongside guidance to those contacting the OCCS with queries. Claire has over 10 years' experience in customer care and handling complaints and claim processes.

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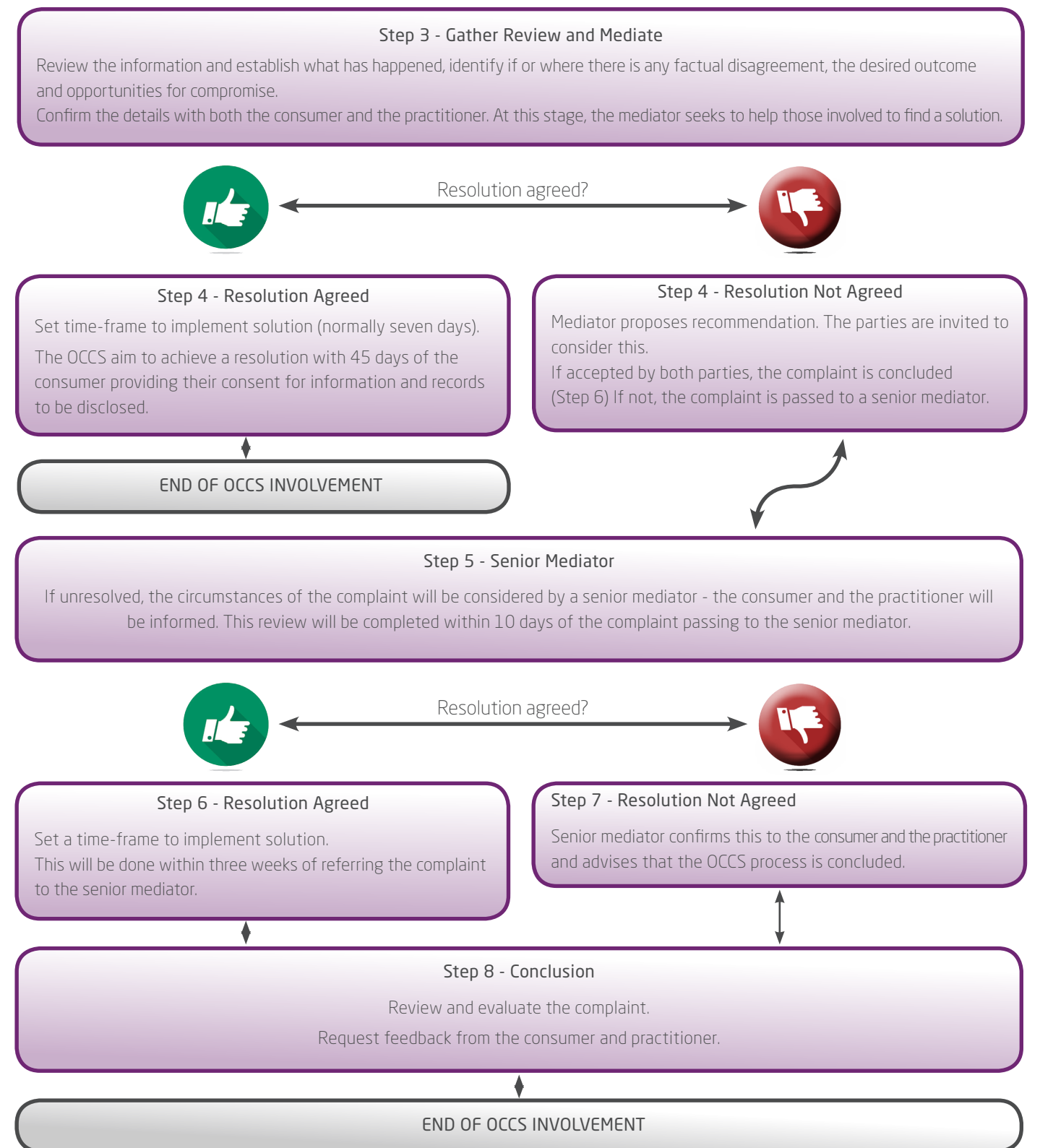
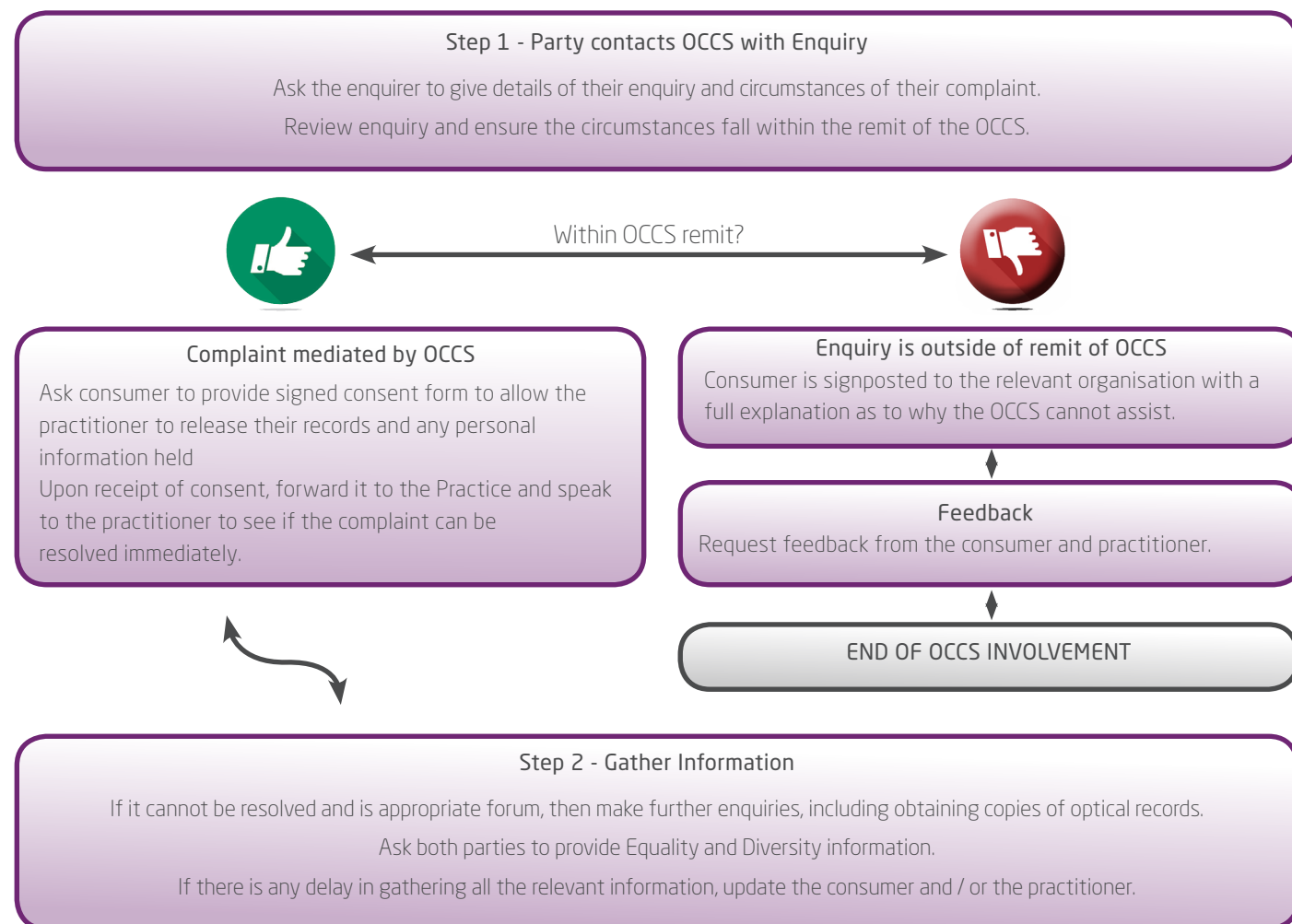
Excellent. Professional. I felt my concerns were listened to. My complaint was handled well.

”



Optical Consumer Complaints Service Mediation Process

How do we do it?



“It was very reassuring and easy to be able to let someone else mediate to avoid further confusion and upset”



Activity Levels

Who calls us?



Ongoing enquiries

4%



Non consumer complaint issues

15%



Consumer complaint issues

81%

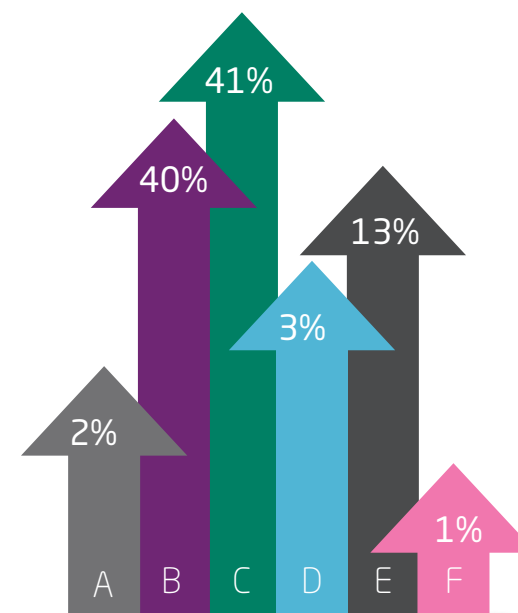
Number of enquiries

622

enquiries received from 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2014

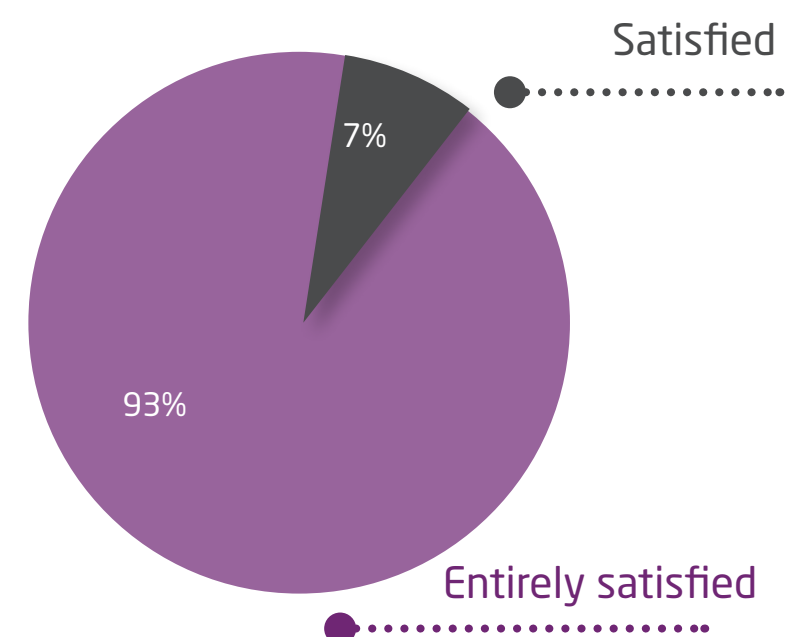
Success

Outcome of Consumer Complaints received by OCCS (2014 - 2015)

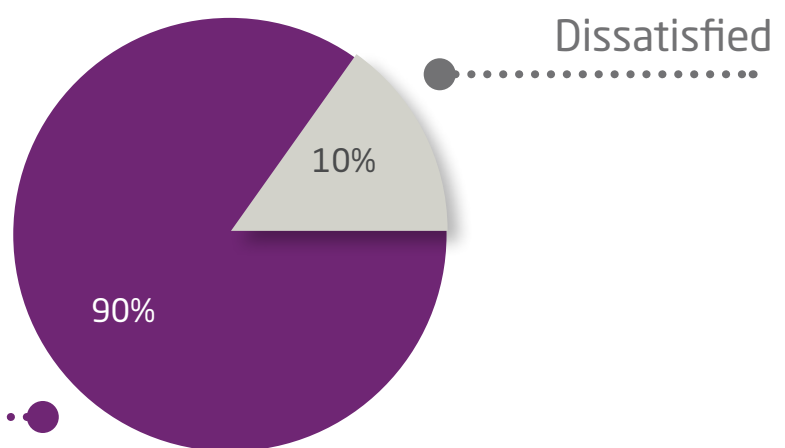


A: Mediation concluded without resolution
B: Preliminary enquiry resolved
C: Mediated solution found
D: Mediated solution found but with some ongoing issues
E: Consumer took no further action following discussion with OCCS
F: Mediated by senior mediating team

Satisfaction with OCCS process



Satisfaction with outcome of OCCS mediation



Timescale for concluded enquiries (all 2014-15)





Why do consumers complain?

Concerns regarding the prescription

The most frequently occurring complaint relates to consumer concerns that the eye examination and the prescription are incorrect, and the subsequent difficulties with lenses experienced by the consumer.

Difficulties with varifocal lenses and dispensing another practice's prescription can be related to this type of complaint, but the OCCS do record these separately (see below).

The OCCS will often provide reassurance to a consumer that an adjustment to their prescription or a variation between prescriptions from different practices does not automatically mean the sight test was poorly conducted. While this specific type of complaint is recorded, this situation occurs on a day to day basis in optical practices, and therefore when the individual or organisation contact the OCCS, this often means there has been a breakdown in communication and the consumer has lost faith in the practice. This may occur for a number of reasons – past experience, previous complaints, other factors in the consumer's life, the consumer's health or the practitioner's approach to situation.

Some complaints do involve practitioner error, but most practitioners would review and correct the prescription and put right any lenses supplied. If the practitioner does not explain why the change is being made or is dismissive of the consumer's concerns this can make it difficult for the practice to resolve the complaint to the consumer's satisfaction.

The OCCS will explore with both parties:

- The difficulties experienced by the consumer

- The explanation for those difficulties and whether this is or should be accepted by the consumer
- The solution proposed by the practitioner
- What solutions may be available

Preliminary enquiries can often be resolved and the relationship between the consumer and practitioner preserved. When trust and confidence has been lost, and communication is strained then the OCCS will help the parties to find and agree a fair solution which they can both accept.

Varifocal tolerance

With over 600 varifocal lenses and prescriptions requiring art as well as science, complaints and enquiries regarding varifocals are the second most common cause of consumer dissatisfaction referred to the OCCS. Varifocals are used by millions of people in the UK. A small percentage may find varifocal (some types of lenses) are not suitable for them. Resolving complaints concerning varifocals often involve the following:

- Explaining adjustment periods
- Reassuring consumers that adjustment to prescription or change to a different manufacturer is not an indicator that the practitioner has made an error
- Discussing with practitioner the advice that should be given to consumers regarding returning to the practice if they cannot adjust to the lenses
- Mediating where the consumer and practitioner fail to agree

- whether the lenses are suitable and appropriate
- Mediating where the consumer and practitioner disagree on whether the consumer has to pay to change lenses to a different type or grade

Dispensing by a different practice

If glasses or lenses are purchased from another practice, the resolution of any setback with the product is more complex. The OCCS support the guidance issued by the Optical Confederation – that the dispensing practice resolves the consumer's concerns and then any discussion regarding the reason for the difficulty takes place between the two practices.

The OCCS will help the practices involved focus on the best interests of the consumer, rather than enter into clinical disagreements which damage consumer trust and confidence in the professions.

In doing so, the OCCS will also provide independent explanation to the consumer as to why prescriptions can vary and give reassurance going forward.

Response to complaint

The way in which a practice responds to a consumer's concerns is also a common reason for consumers to contact the OCCS. Many consumers are aware that optical healthcare requires individual assessment and judgment. When issues arise, many consumers feel able to raise their worries and concerns with the practice. If the consumer feels the practice has dismissed them or their concerns or is disinterested in providing any explanation, then the matter will escalate.

Concerns regarding the sight test and the customer care provided by

the Optometrist are closely linked to this element of complaint, which is reflected in these all being in the five most common issues raised by consumers when contacting the OCCS.

Key things for practitioners to bear in mind when responding to consumer concerns are:

1. Irrespective of how a consumer is behaving, it is likely that they feel vulnerable and worried, and this can result in a consumer acting emotionally, angrily, or in your eyes, unreasonably
2. Help the consumer to formulate why they are dissatisfied. What they complain about may not be the root of their concern
3. Focus on how you can allay the concern and solve the complaint. Do not defend with why's and how's. If the consumer feels you are being defensive then you will both become entrenched
4. Identify the right person in the practice to communicate with the consumer. This may be the most senior optometrist or it may be the front desk team. It may also vary depending on the individual consumer

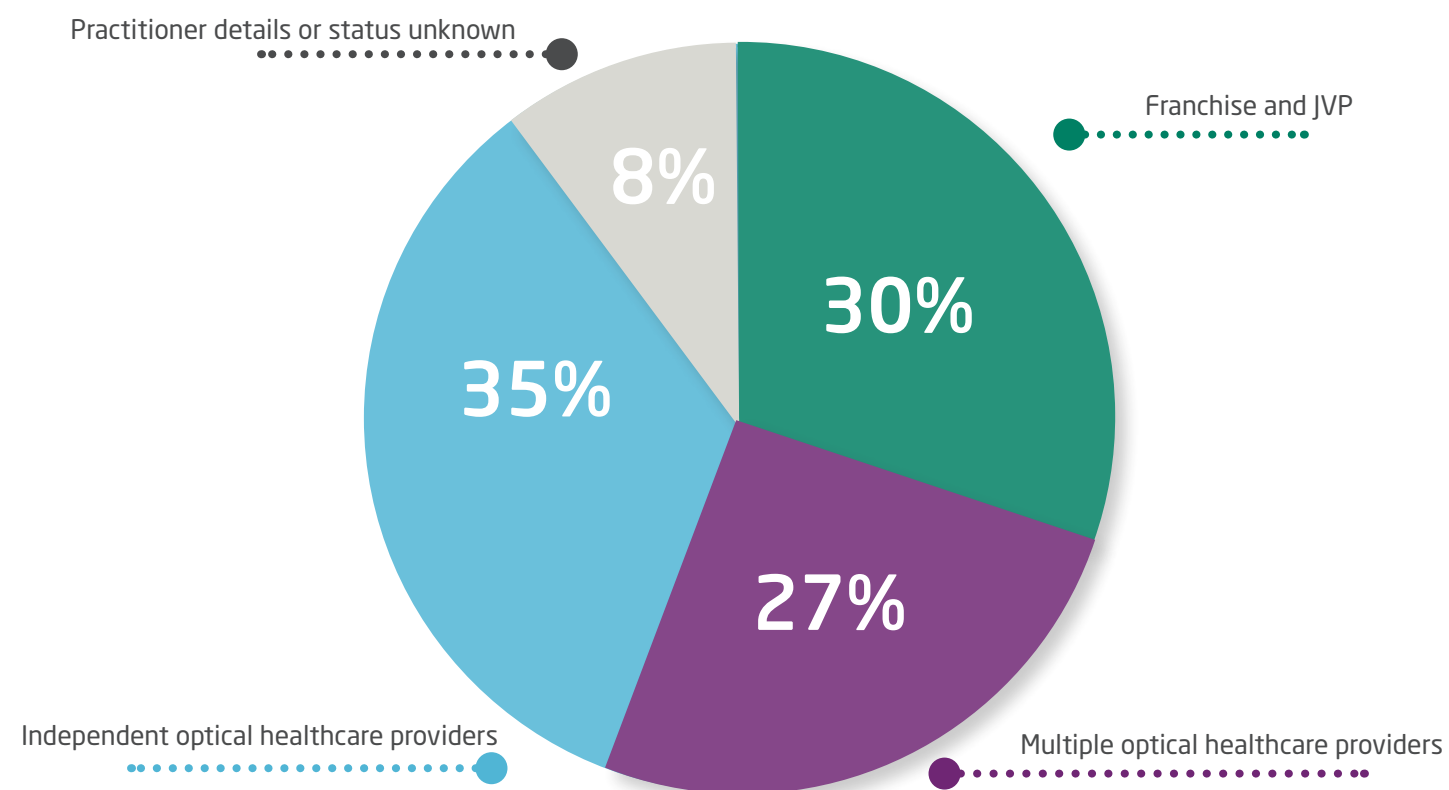
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You achieved in a matter of days the resolution I had been struggling to get since April



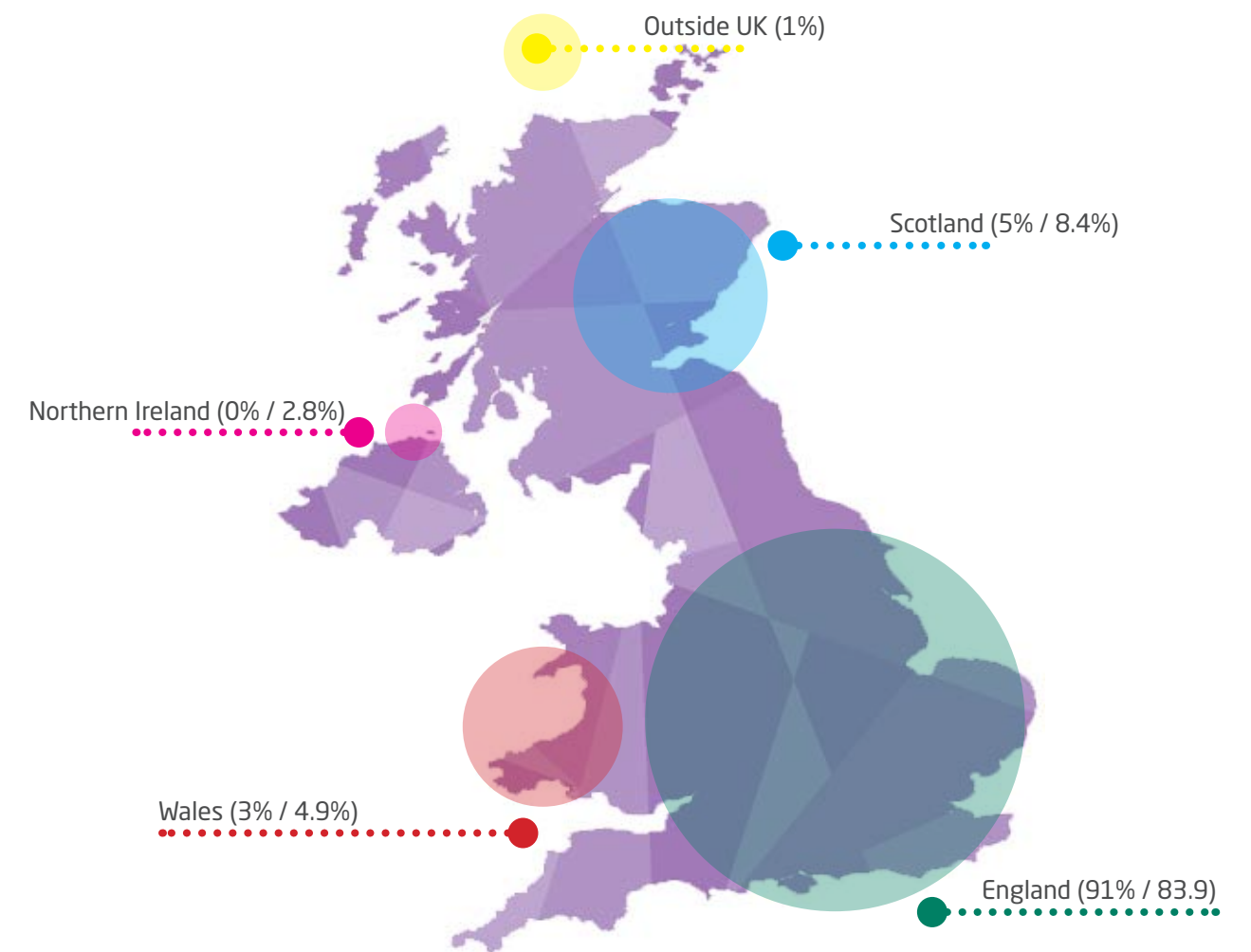
Practice types

Enquiries received by business type

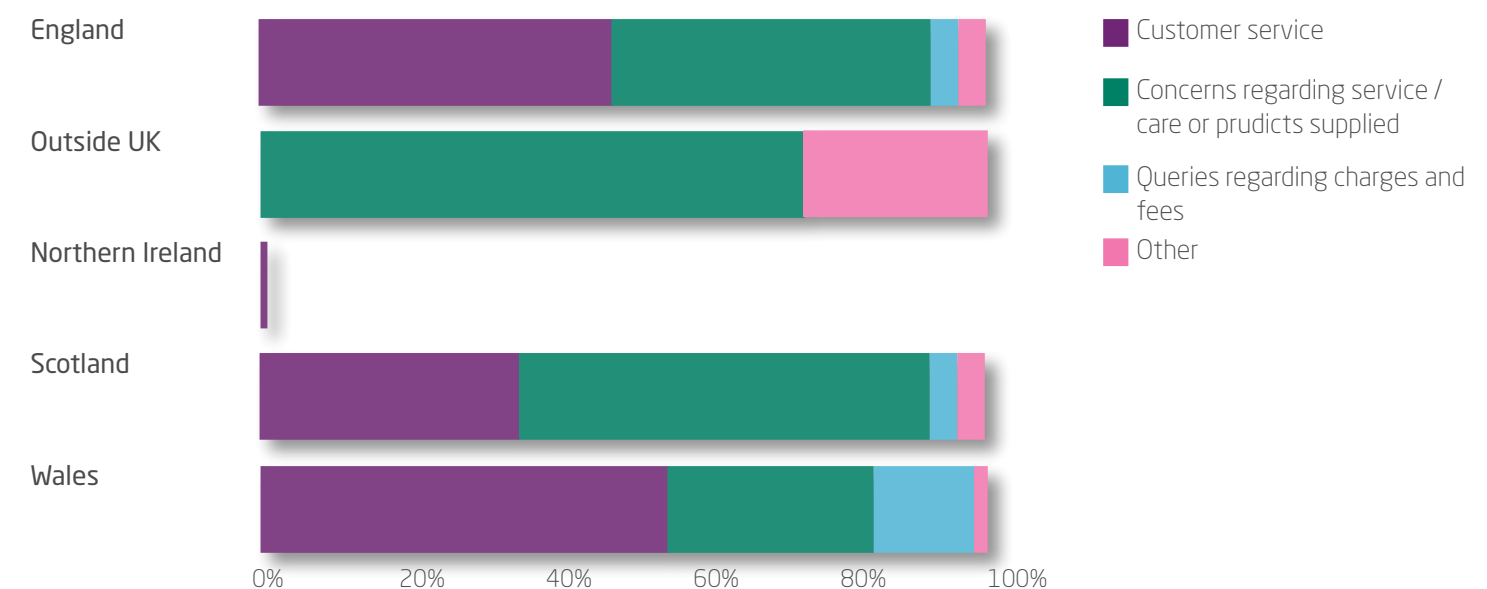


Location

Enquiry numbers by country location
(% of those where location is recorded / general population %)



Nature of the enquiries received by country
(% of enquiries received)





Where else to go if you have a concern about an optician

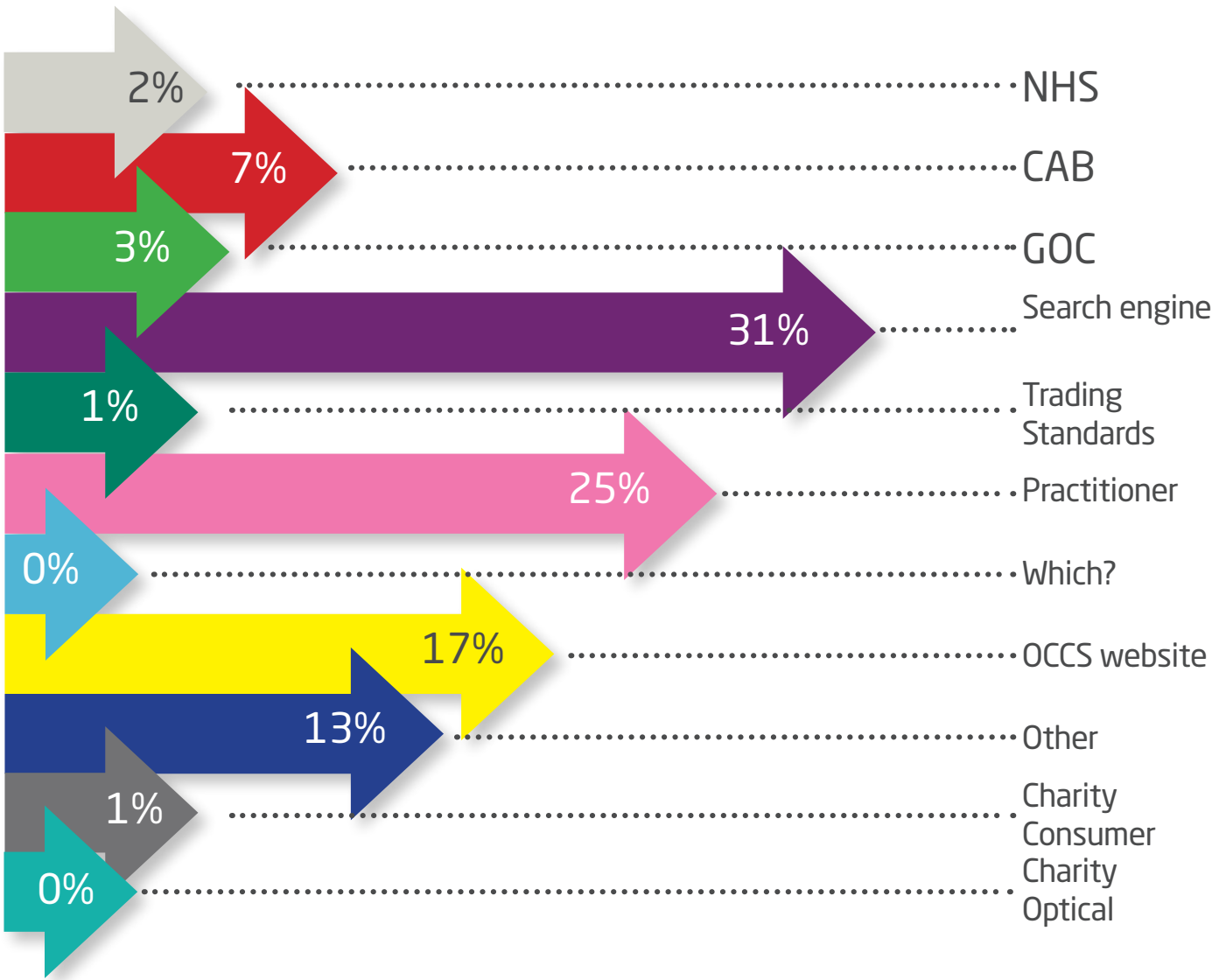
Where the issues do not fall within the consumer complaint remit, the OCCS ensures those in dispute are signposted to the appropriate alternative organisation; whether:

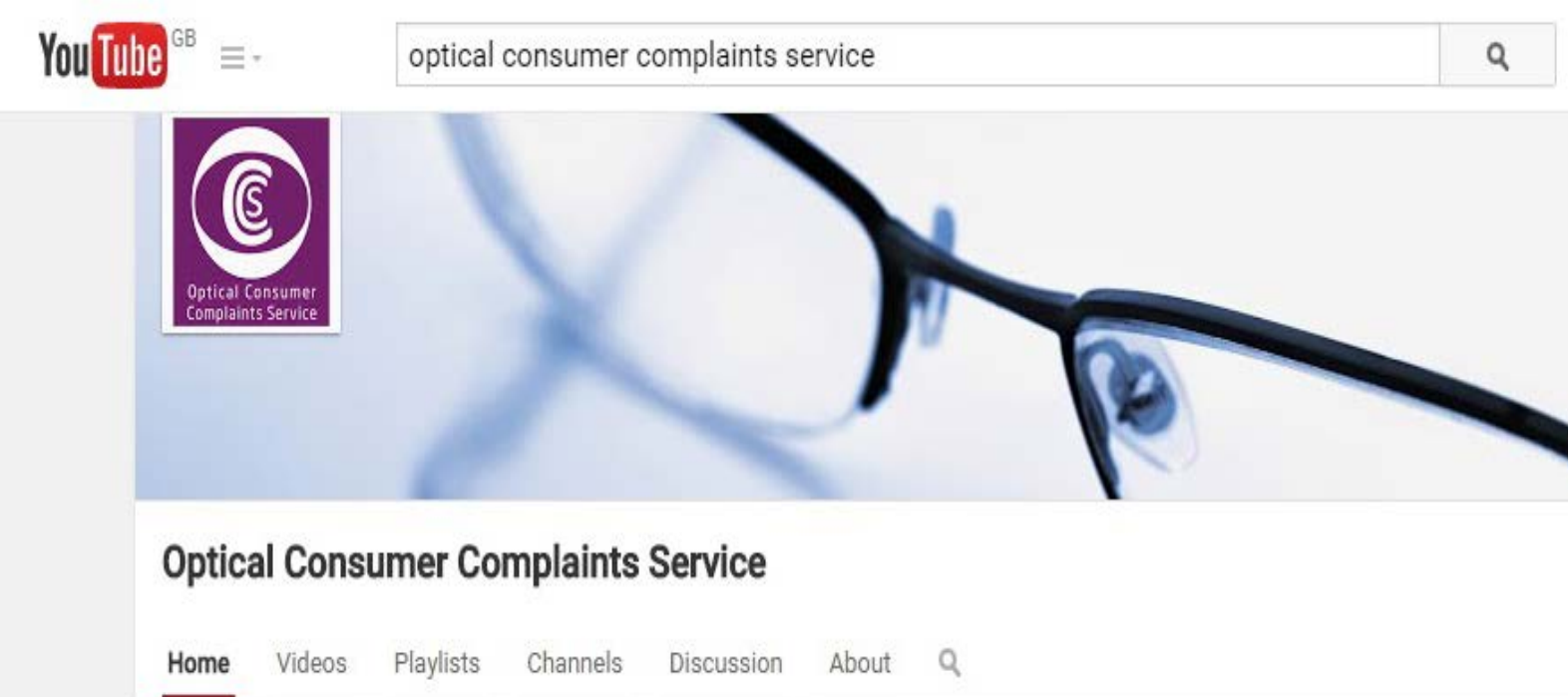
- **NHS Complaints**
NHS England, Patient Advice Services Scotland, Board of Community Health Council Wales and Northern Ireland Patient and Client Council and the relevant ombudsman
- **Professional Conduct Issues**
General Optical Council (GOC)
- **For Independent Legal Advice**
Contact Action Against Medical Accident (AVMA) or the Law Society for details of experts in the relevant area

The OCCS are happy to receive any enquiry and will help a consumer to identify the appropriate organisation to assist with their complaint. Please contact the OCCS or visit our website for relevant contact details for these organisations.

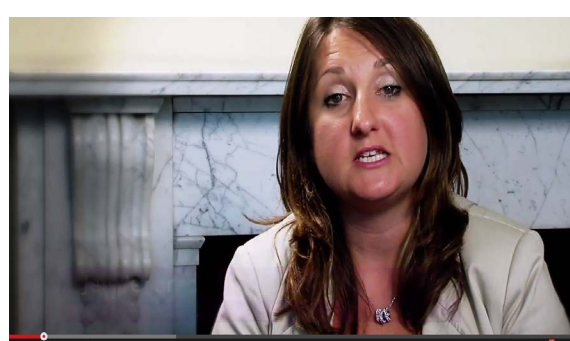
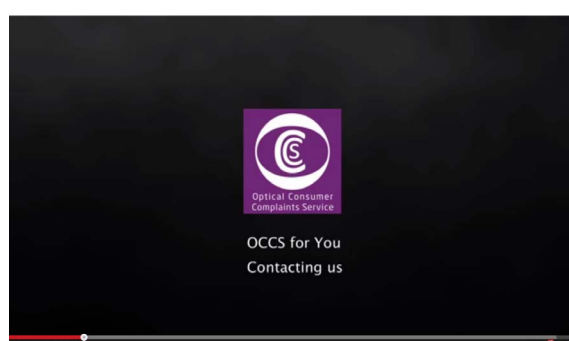
“Clearly much effort and skill was applied to the investigation and recommendation report (of an extremely high standard

How people find out about us





OCCS Online



Any Questions?

How much will it cost to contact the OCCS?

The service is free for consumers. The OCCS is funded by the General Optical Council. There is no charge to optical professionals or practices who want advice or guidance on complaints handling and resolution



Can practitioners contact the OCCS with a query or for advice?

We are more than happy to offer members of the optical professions guidance and an opportunity to talk through an issue or a complaint. This helpline is free and may help you to resolve a complaint within the practice. The OCCS want to be part of the solution to any consumer concern or dispute. We are independent and do not judge any party involved in the complaint.



Is there anything OCCS can do for practitioners if they do not have a consumer complaint to be mediated?

Even if you do not need the OCCS to mediate a particular complaint, the OCCS can help practitioners in everyday practice. We produce regular feedback video podcasts, e-newsletters or issue helpful guidance throughout the year. We look to provide practitioners with an overview and key insights into current trends in patients concerns and top tips in resolution. Please contact us via the website to subscribe for updates.





How to contact OCCS

Call us:

0344 800 5071

Complete the full complaint form at:

www.opticalcomplaints.co.uk

Email us:

enquiries@opticalcomplaints.co.uk

Write to us:

6 Market Square
Bishop's Stortford
Hertfordshire
CM23 3UZ

Who runs the service?



The service is provided by Nockolds Solicitors. This means that it is completely impartial and therefore each complaint is considered fairly and importantly for everyone involved, efficiently, so that you can move on.