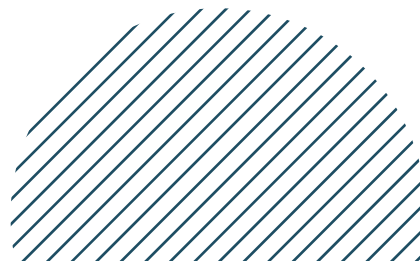
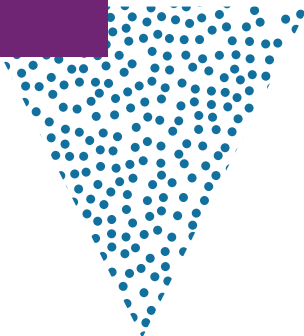


**Optical Consumer
Complaints Service**

**What are the key insights from
the latest OCCS annual report?**





In their recent annual report, the Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS) revealed how “we find ourselves in a world that looks markedly different to the one we lived in prior to 2020”, but goes on to remark how this world is one where “the lasting effects of the pandemic are now being felt as the UK economy struggles with rising living costs”. Clearly a game of two halves, the report illustrates how the lasting impact of Covid-19 on opticians and consumers is every bit as challenging as the pandemic itself. Featuring a wealth of expert insight and helpfully forecasting trends, the report ultimately serves as an invaluable resource for professionals working in the sector.

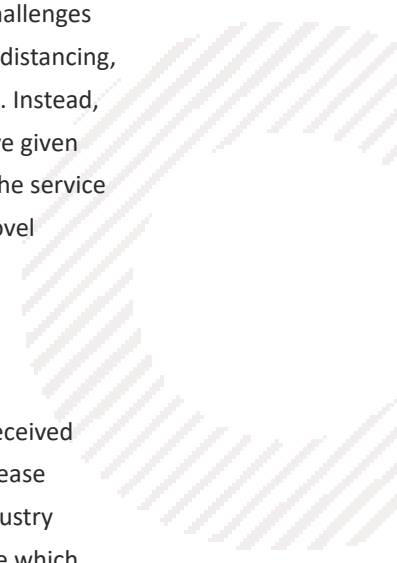
SO, WHAT ARE THE KEY INSIGHTS THAT EMERGE FROM THE REPORT?

Perhaps the most significant takeaway is how the post-covid world presents as many unique challenges as the years 2020-21. Whilst the challenges may not come in the form of facemasks and social distancing, it is clear from the data that consumers have not simply reverted to the way they were in 2019. Instead, they have become far more financially and emotionally stressed as the lifting of lockdowns have given way to a fresh cost of living crisis. This makes the work of the OCCS all the more important as the service is responsible for developing reliable strategies that allow optical professionals to overcome novel challenges.

HOW IS THE WORK OF THE OCCS SUPPORTING THE SECTOR IN 2021-22?

Thanks to an ongoing commitment to making the service as accessible as possible, the OCCS received 1734 enquiries between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022. This figure represents a 22% increase in enquiries on a year-on-year basis, and reveals how the OCCS remains a vital resource for industry professionals. This significant increase in the number of enquiries is attributed to a rise in those which require support at a local level. Indeed, both consumers and practices were more willing to participate in preliminary mediation between 2021-22. One of the many notes of optimism to be found in the report, this greater willingness to enter into mediation should be considered as an encouraging sign for the sector as a whole.

Another factor driving the rise in complaints is the overall climate of society. As the report explains, the transition out of the pandemic, the cost of living crisis, and societal anxiety “have all contributed to a lower acceptance criteria benchmark for complaints being raised, and a heightened level of emotion within the complaints”. This perfect storm has ultimately led to “practices seeking support in handling and resolving these matters locally”. In short, the rise in complaints should not be considered as a reflection of the optical sector underperforming, but of society responding to rapid and drastic changes. Like so many other comparisons in the report, the authors make it clear that circumstances are shifting, making a like for like comparison all but impossible. Instead, it is of more use to describe what is happening now, and how professionals can best navigate the landscape. The report also explains how the rise in activity can also be partially attributed to a greater awareness of the OCCS thanks to ongoing promotional efforts.





Of the total enquiries received, 95% were consumer-related and fell within the remit of the service. Of the 5% that fell outside of remit, only five were submitted to the GOC FtP team. Illustrating an incredible efficiency when it comes to designating complaints to the most appropriate bodies, the small number of disputes that were escalated to the GOC (0.2% of all enquiries received) has to do with the remarkable collaboration between the OCCS and GOC FtP team. The remainder of the complaints which fell outside of the remit of the OCCS have to do with practices not registered with the GOC as well as instances where the complainant was seeking compensation arising from the alleged negligence of the optical professional.

No doubt the most significant statistic to be found in the report is that 95% of all preliminary mediations result in a successful outcome. Confirming that this approach to dispute resolution is a highly effective one, future reports and outputs from the OCCS will continue to explore how this success rate can be brought up even further.

IN CONCLUSION

Altogether, the work of the OCCS in 2021-22 builds on the strength of the service and reveals how consumers and practices continue to find it an invaluable resource. To find out more, and to discover all of the insights featured in the annual report, visit the OCCS website today. In addition to the report, the website provides coverage and advice regarding the latest challenges in the optical sector.

