Optical Consumer Complaints Service

2024-2025

Resolving complaints in a changing consumer landscape

Contents

Introduction

The ongoing cost-of-living crisis and consumer confidence in the UK continues to shape consumer behaviour, with heightened expectations and reduced tolerance for what were once considered reasonable outcomes. Within this challenging landscape, the OCCS has seen increased pressure from consumers expecting greater value and durability from optical products like eyewear. Despite these economic tensions, the OCCS has delivered a strong resolution rate of 89%, up from 85% the previous year. This report outlines how the service has adapted, maintaining fairness and trust while supporting both consumers and optical professionals through an increasingly complex and demanding complaints landscape.

The financial pressures facing UK households have intensified over the past 12 months, with inflationary pressures, rising energy costs, and limited wage growth continuing to squeeze incomes. For many consumers, this strain has triggered heightened scrutiny over their discretionary spend, including those relating to healthcare and optical services. As a result, the OCCS has observed a growing reluctance among consumers to accept outcomes that are considered 'reasonable' within industry standards. Expectations have remained high throughout the year, with many individuals seeking more than just satisfactory service. Indeed, they now expect long-lasting value, especially when making investments in products such as eyewear.

This shift in consumer mindset has created new complexities in complaint resolution. In particular, there is now greater sensitivity around the durability and perceived longevity of eyewear products. Similarly, complaints are increasingly driven by consumer assumptions that spectacles and lenses should endure for longer periods, even in cases where usage, wear, or changes in prescription might naturally impact performance. Naturally, these expectations can lead to friction when industry norms and consumer sentiment diverge, placing further importance on transparent communication and effective complaint management.

The increase in resolution rates this year is a testament to the service's commitment to constructive dialogue, fair mediation, experience of the team and collaborative engagement with all parties involved. What's more, we have strengthened our processes to ensure that every complaint is approached with empathy, clarity, and a solution-focused mindset, all essential qualities in a period where public trust and consumer confidence are under pressure.

It is also important to acknowledge the broader context in which optical practices are operating. The cost-of-living crisis has not only affected consumer attitudes but has also increased operational costs for many practices, impacting their capacity to offer flexibility in complaint settlements. The Primary Care Network paper – The Future of Primary Care (February 2025) has highlighted the pressures on healthcare business this year. The report comments that the sector is reporting flat sales and rising expenses, while increases in National Insurance and minimum wage have impacted many practices. The OCCS continues to play a crucial role in bridging the gap between these competing pressures, promoting balanced outcomes that reflect both the financial limitations of providers and the needs of consumers.

As we move forward, the OCCS remains focused on maintaining high standards of service while remaining responsive to the economic realities faced by both consumers and practitioners. In an increasingly challenging environment, our ability to facilitate fair resolutions and support the optical sector's reputation for professionalism and care has never been more vital.

This report sets out the trends, insights, and outcomes that have defined our work over the last year, and outlines our continued commitment to building trust, promoting fairness, and adapting to a landscape that demands resilience, innovation, and compassion.

The role of the OCCS

The OCCS is a consumer complaint resolution service funded by the General Optical Council. The service uses mediation techniques to support consumers and optical businesses to resolve complaints which have exhausted the practice's own complaint process. The OCCS is an independent service which is funded by the General Optical Council (GOC) and delivered by Nockolds Solicitors. The OCCS is also audited by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute, as an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) approved body under the ADR Regulations.

An overview of the OCCS process is at Appendix 1.

There are many ways in which the OCCS supports consumer complaint resolution:

- local resolution - providing consumers with advice and constructive guidance so they can return to the practice for the complaint to be resolved. This work is invaluable in helping to resolve complaints swiftly and as locally as possible. The team de-escalate and where appropriate, give guidance to help consumers raise their complaint effectively in a focused way which increases the likelihood of local resolution at the first stage;
- signpost consumers to trusted organisations with advice where the complaint falls outside the remit of the OCCS;
- provide advice to aid and improve consumer understanding in terms of the role of the regulator and consumer rights and signpost when necessary;
- through complaint mediation, interacting with consumers and practices to resolve consumer issues;
- gather insight to then be shared with optical professionals and businesses to drive improvements in standards of practice, communication, and customer care.

The OCCS also plays a strategic role in supporting the GOC and the sector to deliver proportionate complaint resolution of complaints. This is achieved by the OCCS resolving complaints which do not amount to fitness to practise (FTP) allegations, allowing the GOC to focus on timely case progression of FTP investigations. Where concerns involving potential FTP allegations are received by the OCCS, these are flagged under a risk-based protocol to ensure serious concerns are referred to the GOC.

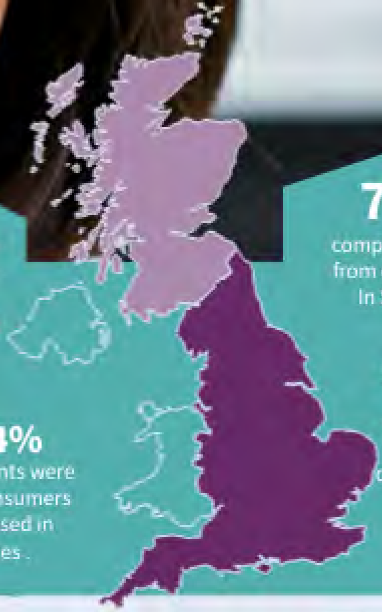
As detailed in this report, the OCCS also prioritises upstreaming and insight sharing work to ensure trends and analysis support improved standards of practice, effective consumer communication and confidence in optical professionals to meet and even exceed, the evolving needs of consumers accessing eye healthcare in the UK.

The activities of the OCCS also seek to strengthen consumer trust and confidence in optical professionals, and greater understanding of the regulatory role of the GOC and complaint redress landscape by GOC registrants.

For further details about the OCCS visit opticalcomplaints.co.uk and follow our social media channels

Executive Summary

Overview of the OCCS activity and insight from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025



1% complaints were from consumers based in Northern Ireland

7% complaints were from consumers in Scotland

88% complaints were from consumers in England

4% complaints were from consumers are based in Wales .

The number of complaints received in 2024-25

1679

-4.4%

95% complaints were consumer related & in remit

86% Complaints resolved within the OCCS process

GOC - OCCS interaction

GOC referrals to OCCS 135 (27% enquiries)

GOC investigations opened 137 (27% enquiries)

OCCS referrals to GOC 7 (0.4% OCCS activity)

Local Resolution **65%**

Practice Advice **6%**

Mediation **18%**

+ Consumer not pursuing matters 11%

93% considered the OCCS to be helpful and efficient — +3% YoY

88% were satisfied with the OCCS process — +8% YoY

8.7/10 overall satisfaction — -% YoY

83% were satisfied with the outcome — +7% YoY

Insight sharing & upstreaming

75 CPD events hosted across the UK

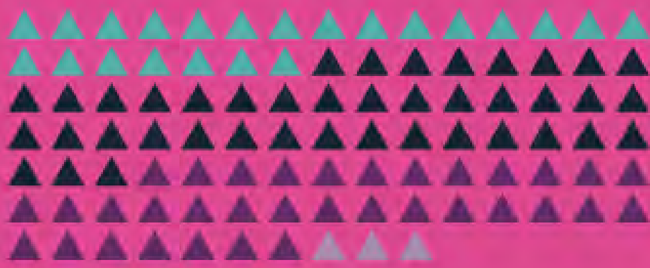
Feedback

More than 9-in-10 consumers would recommend the OCCS

Nature of complaint

- Goods & services (46.46%)
- Customer care (32.32%)
- Product (11.11%)
- Other (5.05%)
- Charges (5.05%)

Complaints relating to:



- Independent practices (22%)
- Franchise or JVP (41%)
- Multiples (34%)
- Other & NHS (3%)

Most common complaints referred to the OCCS

- Prescription issues
- Frame related
- Dispensing
- Customer care on dispensing
- Complaint handling

1 Complaints regarding expectations of an eye examination have doubled this year

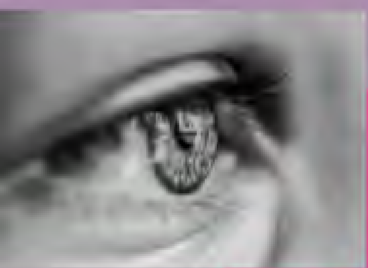
On analysis, some of the increase appears to be driven by greater consumer awareness and higher expectations of the eye examination appointment, particularly in relation to the time available to discuss concerns or worries, and the inclusion of OCT and other elements.

2 Improved resolution rate in refractive surgery complaints

A higher proportion of these complaints are coming through to mediation, however along side this is an improvement in resolution rates so overall more consumers are benefiting from using the OCCS and achieving an acceptable outcome.

3 Increase in complaints relating to domiciliary eye healthcare fall

53 complaints relating to domiciliary were received by the OCCS, representing a fall from the significant increase (98) seen last year and a return to similar levels received in 2023 (42). Activity in this area remains higher than in pre-pandemic years.



The OCCS team

As announced earlier in the year, Richard Edwards retired from his role as Clinical and Strategic Advisor to the OCCS after 10 years with the service. Richard made a huge contribution to the work of the OCCS and in particular, the upstreaming and insight sharing work of the service, and we wish him a wonderful retirement!

The OCCS is delighted to welcome Paul Chapman-Hatchett to the team, and following a transitional period alongside Richard, Paul is now supporting the OCCS, sector and consumers as our Clinical Advisor

For more details about the team visit: opticalcomplaints.co.uk/meet-the-team

OCCS objectives 2024-25

Progress overview

Leverage OCCS data and trends to drive continuous improvement across the optical sector, providing clear, evidence-based insight that informs best practice and enhances complaint resolution strategies.

Continue to support the GOC in embedding and evolving efficient, fair, and proportionate case-handling processes, ensuring alignment with PSA performance standards and strengthening public confidence in regulatory outcomes.

Enhance the accessibility and inclusivity of OCCS services for all users, with a specific focus on those who are neurodiverse, disabled, or made vulnerable by their circumstances, to ensure equitable access to mediation and fair complaint outcomes.

Contribute to the continued development and practical implementation of business regulation in optics, engaging with the GOC's reviews of both individual and business standards to support clarity, compliance, and the role of regulation in complaint redress.

OCCS Activity

Between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025, the OCCS received a total of 1,679 complaints, with 1,594 falling within remit. This reflects a slight but meaningful reduction compared to the same period in the previous year, when 1,755 complaints were received, with 1,631 falling within the OCCS remit. The 4.33% decrease in overall complaint volume may attributed to a range of factors:

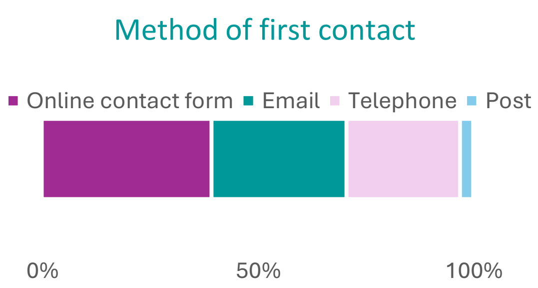
- indicators from practice suggest activity in the sector has been level year on year[1]
- be perceived as a positive indicator, suggesting that improvements across the optical sector, whether it's in communication, customer care, product quality, or expectations management, are beginning to make a tangible difference.

While complaint numbers can fluctuate for a variety of reasons, this trend is particularly encouraging given the ongoing pressures on household finances, which have continued to heighten consumer expectations and scrutiny. It may also indicate that practices are adopting more proactive approaches to handling concerns before they escalate, supported in part by OCCS guidance, resources, and sector engagement.

Importantly, this reduction does not signal a drop in accessibility or visibility of the OCCS—awareness and use of the service remain strong. Instead, it reflects a sector gradually embedding more effective, preventative practices, with the OCCS continuing to play a key role in promoting resolution-focused thinking and upholding high standards across the profession.

Accessing the OCCS

In 2024–2025, the OCCS continued to provide an accessible, approachable, and flexible service to all users, with multiple channels to ensure people could raise concerns in a way that suited their individual needs and preferences. While the total number of initial contact submissions decreased compared to 2023–2024, this change reflects a broader trend of more targeted and appropriate use of the service, rather than a decline in accessibility or awareness.



Notably, contact via the OCCS website remained the most popular access point, with 345 users choosing this channel, demonstrating that our digital presence continues to provide a convenient and user-friendly route for those seeking help. Although email and phone enquiries decreased, these reductions may indicate that improved clarity on the website and in

[1] Primary Care Network – Future of primary care report

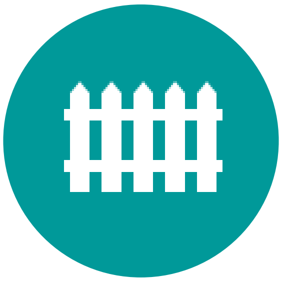
public-facing guidance is successfully helping users navigate the service more efficiently and with greater confidence.

The drop in contact via letter also reflects the growing preference for digital communication, aligning with broader trends in consumer engagement. Throughout the year, the OCCS remained committed to ensuring accessibility for all, including those less confident online. We continue to ensure that, regardless of method, all consumers and professionals feel supported, listened to, and empowered to seek fair outcomes through our service.

OUTCOMES

The OCCS provides a range of support to facilitate the proportionate resolution of consumer optical complaints. Wherever possible, the OCCS will enable consumers to bring their complaints to the service. There are occasions when the OCCS is unable to assist because no GOC registrant is involved (either individual or business). We are seeing an increase in complaints regarding online providers including those where we cannot identify a registrant.

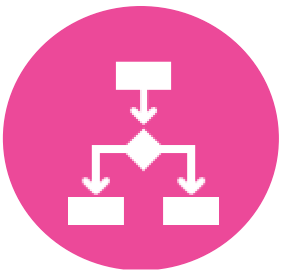
Where a complaint is in remit, the OCCS will encourage and support local resolution by providing initial mediation-based input to help consumers to work with the practice to find an agreeable resolution. If this has been exhausted, the OCCS will provide highly effective resolution support, enabling the consumer and practice to understand the reasons for the complaint and the barriers to resolution to date. Overall, this means that 86% of referrals in remit are resolved within the OCCS process which demonstrates the value of the service for both consumers and optical practices.



Out of remit,
86 (5% of all enquiries)

Practice enquiries,
91 (5% of all enquiries)

Supporting local resolution:
Advice 473 (29%)
Returned to practice 550 (33%)



Consumer not to pursue,
167 (10% of all enquiries)

Resolved on mediation, 241
(15% of all enquiries)

Concluded without a resolution, 49
(3% of all enquiries)

Remit

The 2024–2025 reporting reveals continued progress in how the OCCS supports and engages with both consumers and optical professionals. Notably, 95% of all enquiries received fell within remit. This indicates that greater awareness and understanding of the OCCS's role is helping to ensure that those reaching out to the service are doing so at the right time and for the right reasons, enabling more effective and timely resolutions.

Fig 2.	2024-25
Out of remit (5% of all enquiries)	86
Civil claim for compensation	8
Referred to GOC by OCCS	7
No GOC registrant involvement	40
Not a UK practice	9
Other complaints:	22
Not an optical complaint	4
Complaint circumstances or final complaint response over 12 months ago	8
Other	10

Seven concerns were referred to the General Optical Council, which less than 0.5% of enquiries received by the OCCS. This is consistent with last year, when six concerns were referred by the OCCS. The concerns referred this year included complaints where the consumer felt their concerns should be investigated by the regulator, however it was likely that they circumstances would not amount to an allegation of impaired fitness to practise. In this scenario, the OCCS will explain the role of the GOC and how the acceptance criteria are applied, to help consumer make an informed decision on whether to refer their concern to the GOC.

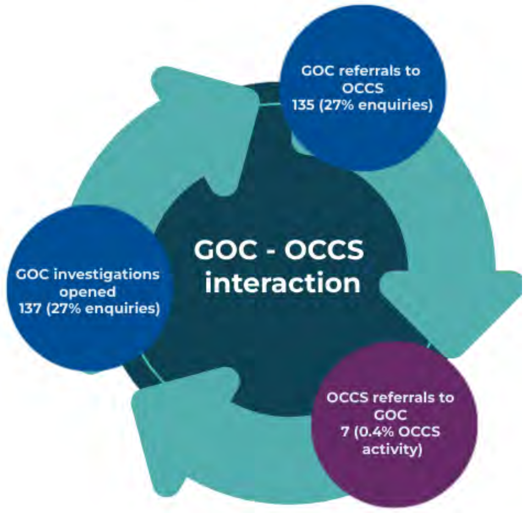
We have also been monitoring referrals which are out of remit and note we have received 75 referrals relating to online providers over the last two years, which fall outside of remit as no registrant can be identified. The OCCS will continue to capture data and insight on this to feed into the business regulation review.

Collaborating with the GOC Triage Team

The OCCS provides highly effective support to the fitness to practise process within the General Optical Council in that concerns which do not amount to potential FtP allegations are referred or self-triage to the OCCS.

This allows the GOC Regulation team to focus resources on FtP concerns and provides complainants with a resolution-focused pathway to resolve their concerns with the practice.

This year 135 complaints (up from 81 Last year) were referred to OCCS by the GOC Triage team, from a total of 506 concerns received by the GOC, which equates to 27% of all enquiries. This represents a 40% increase in the number of referrals to the OCCS by the GOC between 2023-24 and 2024-25. Earlier referral of these concerns to the OCCS increases the likelihood of the complaint being resolved through the OCCS mediation process and heightens consumer satisfaction.



There will also be referrals which will have reviewed the GOC website and self-triaged to the OCCS, or where the complainant was signposted to the OCCS as part of an early enquiry to the GOC.

The OCCS and GOC Triage teams continue to work collaboratively to support effective triage and ensuring that concerns are handled in the most proportionate forum. This collaboration aims to increase registrant awareness and understanding of the role of the GOC and the impact of the OCCS thereby enhancing consumer confidence and trust in both optical professionals and practices. This also provides reassurance to registrants regarding the GOC's strategic aim to deliver compassionate and agile regulation.

IN REMIT REFERRALS[2]

Practice advice

Additionally, 6% of contacts were from optical practices seeking advice, an encouraging 4% increase from the previous year. This modest but meaningful growth demonstrates the OCCS's ongoing success in promoting its advisory function to professionals, encouraging early intervention and equipping practices with the tools to manage and resolve issues locally. This proactive approach not only empowers professionals but also helps to de-escalate concerns before they escalate into formal complaints.

[2] Hereafter percentages refer to the proportion of complaints in remit, rather than all enquiries received.

Supporting local and early resolution

Notably, 35% of enquiries were identified as matters that were, or should have been, within the practice's own complaint process. These were supported through the local resolution phase, reflecting our commitment to collaboration, early guidance, and reinforcing the importance of local resolution as a first step. This combined effort continues to strengthen complaint handling across the optical sector.

The OCCS team plays a pivotal role at the early stages of complaint handling, working to calm tensions, de-escalate situations wherever possible, and to guide complaints toward constructive resolution. Often, consumers reach out after submitting a complaint with a practice, but they feel dissatisfied with the outcome or the pace. In other instances, they contact the OCCS before raising the issue directly with the practice, seeking clarity and advice on how to proceed. Complaints at this stage, where the matter is still at practice level, remain the most common type of enquiry, consistent with last year's data.

A further 30% of referrals were assisted by the OCCS providing "Advice Only" support, offering insight and direction to assist consumers in their understanding. This advisory function is valuable for both consumers and practitioners as early engagement and clarification help to prevent escalation.

In 2023–24, 11% of enquiries within OCCS remit were categorised as "consumer not to pursue," where individuals chose not to proceed with mediation even after local resolution had been exhausted. This marked a significant improvement, representing a numerical 24% decrease from 2022-23 and a 13% decrease year on year which indicates greater consumer engagement and trust in mediation as a constructive route for resolving complaints. We continue to monitor this as it has been noted that the proportion of consumers with a domiciliary care complaint who do not progress into mediation is slightly higher. This will be monitored and evaluated.

There are several reasons why consumers may ultimately decide not to proceed. Some are seeking an investigative or adjudicative process and may consider alternative routes such as legal proceedings. Others may disengage during the process, choosing not to return the Agreement to Mediate form or respond to further communication. In some cases, initial contact with the OCCS may offer the reassurance or clarity the consumer needed to reach closure independently, without continuing the formal process.

The reduction in non-pursuit cases reflects growing confidence in the mediation pathway highlighting the OCCS's success in providing timely, balanced, and accessible guidance. As the service continues to evolve, ensuring that consumers are well-informed and supported at every step remains central to encouraging full engagement in the complaint resolution journey.

Mediations

When local resolution has been exhausted or proves ineffective, the OCCS plays a crucial role in facilitating impartial, constructive mediation between consumers and optical practices. This stage of the process is activated once it becomes clear that a complaint cannot be resolved solely between the parties involved. At this point, the OCCS steps in to provide a structured, neutral space where both the consumer's concerns and the practice's position can be discussed openly and fairly, to reach a mutually acceptable outcome.

Between April 2024 and March 2025, 18% of all OCCS enquiries progressed to formal mediation. This figure remains consistent with the data from 2023–24, indicating a steady demand for this deeper level of intervention. The consistency also suggests that while local resolution remains the primary focus and is often successful, a reliable proportion of complaints benefit from further, structured mediation support. These cases usually involve more complex concerns or instances where communication between the parties has broken down.

The outcomes achieved through OCCS mediation are varied and tailored to the specific circumstances of each case. Common resolutions include supporting consumers to return to the practice for a further consultation or assessment, which often leads to adjustments, repairs, or even a replacement product being offered. In some cases, partial or full refunds are agreed upon as a goodwill gesture or in recognition of a service shortfall. Other forms of resolution include the provision of supplementary or complementary products, reinstatement of NHS vouchers, and formal apologies where appropriate.

A particularly valuable aspect of the mediation process is its emphasis on restoring relationships and trust. Rather than focusing on blame, the OCCS encourages open dialogue and realistic expectations, which can lead to outcomes that are satisfactory to all parties involved. This not only resolves the immediate complaint but also supports ongoing consumer confidence in the optical profession.

Mediation through the OCCS is not a one-size-fits-all approach. The process is highly adaptable, informed by the unique needs of the consumer and the professional, and delivered by a team skilled in both the optical sector and mediation techniques. Every resolution is the result of careful negotiation, empathy, and a commitment to fairness.

The fact that over 80% of complaints progressing to mediation are resolved demonstrates the OCCS's readiness to step in when needed and to provide a robust mechanism for addressing more entrenched complaints. As pressures on both consumers and practices continue, whether due to economic conditions or evolving expectations, this impartial and supportive service remains vital.

Overall, the mediation service offered by the OCCS remains an essential part of the complaint resolution pathway, ensuring that even the more complex or unresolved matters are given the time, care, and structure necessary to achieve fair and practical outcomes.

By combining deep knowledge of the optical sector with professional mediation techniques, the OCCS team can offer practical and impartial support from the very first point of contact. Where local resolution proves ineffective or breaks down, the OCCS can step in more formally, progressing the matter to full mediation and helping both consumers and practices work toward a fair and balanced outcome. The day-to-day contact with practice teams underpins the CPD and session work we do to prepare and equip optical professions, and in turn assist practices to deliver high standards of customer and patient care. Emphasising that only 2% of the cases that come to the OCCS conclude the process without a resolution, the sessions highlight to optical professionals that the mediation team are highly effective, and also if registrants take on board some of the complaint management skills (Using AERO (c) framework to manage complaints), they will be able to resolve these lived experiences issues themselves and they will never reach the OCCS.

OCCS IMPACT

Resolutions

Many consumers who contacted the OCCS expressed a strong desire for an apology from the optical practice as a key part of resolving their complaint. For many, the call for an apology stemmed not only from dissatisfaction with the product or service received but also from the emotional impact of how they were treated, often citing poor communication, feeling dismissed or disrespected, or being accused of dishonesty. Apologies were seen to acknowledge distress, rebuild trust, and restore dignity, particularly for long-standing or vulnerable patients who felt let down by the practice.

Others sought an apology for administrative failings, missed appointments, delays, or receiving incorrect or misleading information, especially when these issues had tangible consequences such as affecting vision, causing financial loss, or leading to unnecessary stress. In many cases, people also requested apologies from specific staff members, reflecting the personal nature of their grievances.

Ultimately, the desire for an apology often reflected a broader wish for accountability, empathy, and recognition of the inconvenience, upset, or harm caused. While the OCCS cannot compel practices to apologise, many consumers saw it as a vital gesture of goodwill and a necessary first step toward resolution and closure.

Overall, the similarities with last year’s data indicate that resolution rates have remained relatively stable, even amidst a growingly challenging economic environment. This consistency makes the close rate all the more meaningful, highlighting the OCCS’s ability to deliver successful outcomes despite external pressures. Sustaining such performance in the face of economic uncertainty is a testament to the service’s resilience and continued effectiveness.

Timescales

14 days

Average number of days – ALL receipt to conclusion

69 days

Average number of days – Mediated complaints

97 days

Average number of days – Mediated refractive eye surgery complaints

OCCS's ability to resolve matters swiftly, despite the growing complexity of cases and ongoing societal and financial pressures on consumers and practices alike.

Looking specifically at mediated cases, the average resolution time has also improved slightly, now standing at 69 days, down from 71 from last year. This subtle reduction suggests greater effectiveness in managing more intricate disputes without sacrificing the quality or fairness of outcomes.

For refractive surgery-related complaints, which often involve clinical details and higher emotional stakes, the data shows strong consistency: the average resolution time is 97 days, up 2 days on 2023-24. These timelines are linked to the refined mediation process used in refractive surgery related complaints, more complex nature of the issues involved, and the level of information shared by consumers and practices.

Overall, this refined dataset confirms the OCCS's continued dedication to swift, balanced, and consumer-focused complaint resolution.

OCCS Feedback

The OCCS uses a range of methods to request feedback on the service experience.

- Short, accessible surveys to all service users which consumer mainly utilise to provide feedback. Response rates were 12% in 2023-24, a decrease of by 2%. The OCCS continues to refresh the survey content and style to seek to improve the response rate; however, for a non-incentivised feedback method, 5% is the lower end of the response rates.

- Stakeholder meetings including with Defence Bodies such as AOP and FODO;

- Regular meetings with businesses operating multiple practices.

Service users also contact us via email to share feedback. Here are some examples:

'I would gladly use mediation and alternative dispute resolution methods again if needed. Their effectiveness and commitment to fair resolution make them a preferred choice for resolving consumer disputes"-

Client

'I am extremely satisfied with the outcome of my complaint, thanks to the exemplary support and dedication of my resolution manager and the OCCS team. They exceeded my expectations and provided a resolution that truly addressed my concerns."-

Client

'I would certainly recommend OCCS to all my family, friends and work colleagues, what an excellent service."-

Client

'I felt the OCCS staff were working in my best interests and fully grasped the matter in hand."

Client

'I wholeheartedly believe that the outcome of my complaint was fair and just. My resolution manager ensured that my concerns were thoroughly considered, and the resolution reached was equitable and satisfactory.

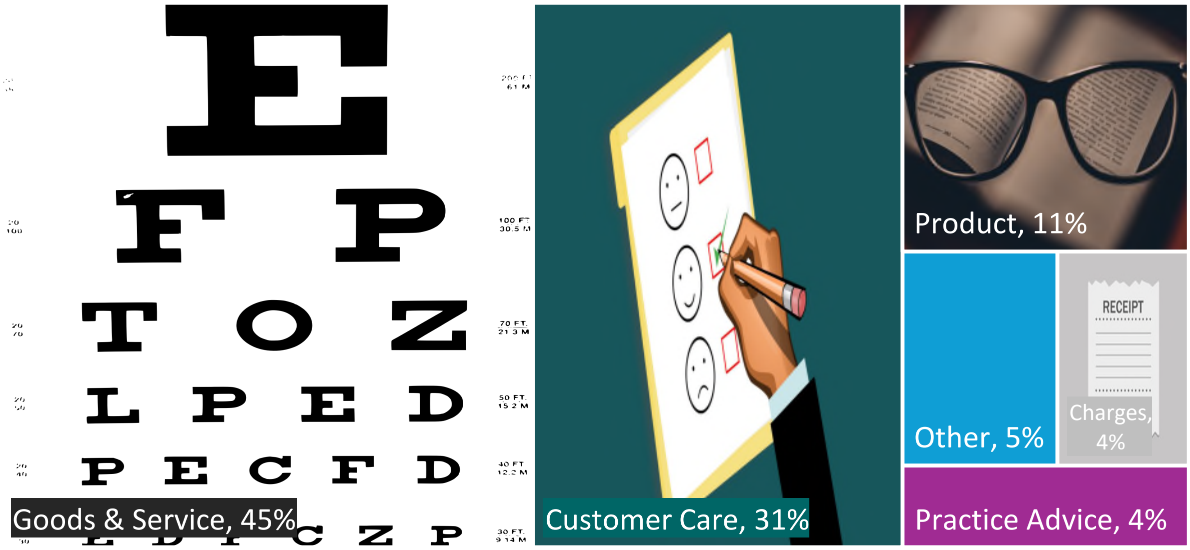
Client

Complaint insight

Of the complaints that were resolved through mediation between 2024 – 25, the largest share was attributed to the category of Goods & Services. In total, complaints of this nature represented 46% of the total number of complaints received. Similar to last year, this datapoint suggests the ongoing effects of the cost-of-living crisis. More specifically, a greater number of people complaining over goods and services suggests that there is a lower tolerance for imperfections and a higher expectation than there was before.

OCCS MEDIATION INSIGHT

NATURE OF COMPLAINT



When considering the concerns raised in the different complaint categories:

- 23% of complaints relate to the consumer perception of the service delivery (up from 19% in 2023-24)
- 21% of complaints relate to concerns about the eye examination itself (18% in 2023-24)
- 25% of complaints relate to the dispense stage of the consumer interaction (26% in 2023-24)

The five most common scenarios referred to the OCCS in 2024-25 were:

1. Consumer considers there to be an error with the prescription (207)
2. Practice not dealing with the complaint (182)
3. Dispensing (145)
4. Complaint regarding the spectacle frame (96)
5. Dispensing optician customer care (77)

Analysis – clinical and optometric concerns

During 2024-25, the OCCS has seen an increase in complaints regarding:

- Cataract related complaints have increased by 70% (from 7 to 23, which is a statistically significant increase). This may be as a result of an increase in ophthalmology NHS departments and also private providers. These complaints are often linked to communication and, in particular, the treatment threshold variances in NHS criteria and where private providers may apply different thresholds, so are surgically treating cataracts at an earlier stage.

- Concerns regarding the eye examination, including expectations of the sight test and time available, have nearly doubled in the last year. This increase has been seen across all parts of the sector. On analysis, some of the increase appears to be driven by greater consumer awareness and higher expectations of the eye examination appointment, particularly in relation to the time available to discuss concerns or worries.

- Complaints relating to the perceived or actual accuracy of the prescription provided accounted for around 12% of the complaints referred to the OCCS. Analysis indicates these complaints involve situations where a returning consumer is advised to persevere, however research [3]suggests that in 80% of situations, there is an underlying prescription issue, rather than a matter of non-tolerance or adjustment. The OCCS intends to focus on this in forthcoming insight-led CPD sessions.

- Diagnosis related complaints have also increased statistically in 2024-25 (from 25 to 48) which represents a return to levels seen in 2022-23. This is still 25% lower than the peak in 2021-22 when we saw 63 diagnosis related complaints. These relate to referral pathways, categorisation (urgent or routine referrals) and referrals made where the ophthalmology subsequently reassured the consumer that all was well.

  Misdiagnosis, while rare, is one of the more serious concerns brought to the OCCS, as it can relate directly to a consumer's eye health and long-term well-being. Consumer satisfaction in this type of complaint highlights the value in enhancing communication focus in clinical training, better use of diagnostic technology, or more robust internal procedures for escalation and referral within practices. It may also indicate a greater emphasis on patient education, ensuring that consumers have a clearer understanding of their condition and the limitations or scope of an optometrist's role.

The increase in diagnosis concerns is driven by more glaucoma and retinal detachment concerns and an increase in miscellaneous issues. Only two complaints related to macular degeneration, and this included a situation where the consumer was reassured, they did not have AMD. The 'Macular

[3] Beesley J, Davey CJ, Elliott DB. What are the causes of non-tolerance to new spectacles and how can they be avoided? Ophthalmic and Physiological Optics. 2022;42(3):619–32.

Spectacular' initiative, informed by OCCS insight, is now in its third year, and it is pleasing to see the impact continue.

The analysis suggests a positive trend: consumers are becoming more confident in identifying and raising issues that directly impact their vision and quality of life. This increased reporting may also reflect heightened awareness of their rights, as well as greater trust in the OCCS as a safe and impartial space to raise concerns. They also underscore the importance of effective communication, clear expectation setting and patient-centred care in optical services. While these complaints can be complex, they offer valuable opportunities for learning and service improvement across the sector.

While the OCCS does not assess the clinical accuracy of care, its role in facilitating open dialogue helps to rebuild trust and clarify expectations where misunderstandings occur. This decline in misdiagnosis complaints is a welcome trend and reflects the optical sector's commitment to maintaining high clinical standards and patient-focused care.

The OCCS continues to use its sector insight to support both consumers and practices in navigating these sensitive issues, ensuring that concerns are addressed through careful mediation and, where possible, resolved at a local level.

We continue to address the majority of these complaints through referral to practice with preliminary mediation, advice and local resolution support. Insight from discussions with consumers who refer their diagnosis concerns to the OCCS indicates that consumers reach out to the OCCS as they are seeking external reassurance and support to obtain clarification or an acknowledgement from the practice that there was an issue with the diagnosis or the pathway. For many consumers, they are anxious about their health and sight, and the situation is exacerbated when the communication and explanations do not meet their expectations or needs.

Complaints in this group which fall outside of remit were a combination of consumers wanting to refer the matter to the GOC or where there are allegations of negligence and resulting harm, which gives rise to a legal claim. These were signposted and provided information to help the consumer to obtain independent legal advice in their local area.

Analysis – complaints involving refractive surgery see a significant increase in successful mediations

The number of complaints relating to refractive eye surgery has remained consistent with last year. Historically, these complaints taken longer to resolve and had a lower resolution rate due to the nature of the issues involved. Where the complaint involves allegations of harm or impaired vision, the complainant is sign posted as the OCCS does not mediate complaints involving clinical negligence allegation and harm. The service does mediate consumer related issue and concerns regarding a refractive surgery provider who is a GOC business registrant. This year has seen a significant increase in the success rate of mediations up from 56% in 22/23 to 89% in 2024-25. This is a testament to the input of all parties involved and a commitment to finding an agreeable solution for complainants.

Analysis – complaints involving contact lenses

In 2024-25, the OCCS saw a statistical increase in complaints involving contact lenses, up to 24 from 6 in the previous year. On reviewing, the increase was attributable to a change in supplier by a multiple provider in early 2025. This came to the OCCS team's attention, and the OCCS sought to provide information and guidance to consumers and liaised with the provider to ensure consumers were informed and remedial action in hand.

Analysis – dispensing related complaints

While complaints regarding dispensing overall are largely level, year on year, complaints involving the dispense of varifocal lenses fell by 81% year on year. OCCS CPD has historically focused on how to minimise complaints in this area. Ongoing insight sharing will include further insight on effective communication and in particular helping eye healthcare professionals to approach conversations with consumers where the complainant is seeking a refund or lens change.

Analysis – customer care and lived experience complaints

The way in which eye healthcare is delivered and the consumer perception of that service sits at the heart of customer care related complaints referred to the OCCS. In recent years all sectors have reported an increase in attitudinal and service complaints. In 2024-25, the OCCS received fewer complaint regarding after care, general attitudes, complaint handling and optometrist customer care. There was an increase in customer care by dispensing opticians, but it should be noted that this was a new category added in 2023-24 so year on year comparison must been seen in that context.

Analysis – complaint insight by business types

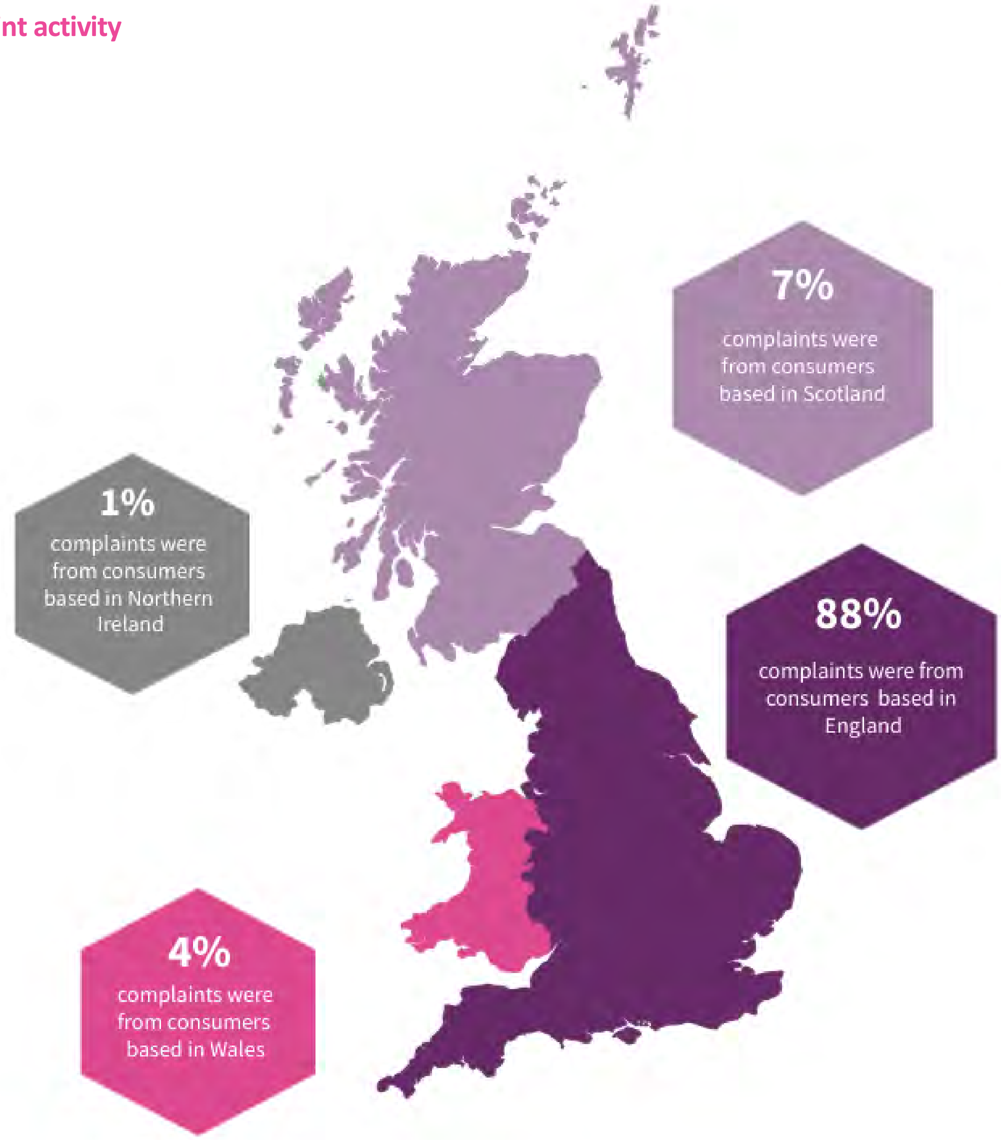
The nature of complaints referred to the OCCS based on business type is generally aligned with market share and overall complaint circumstances. Over 50% of the Practice enquiries were received from practices in the independent sector, which is to be expected given the support available central office and professional standards in large multiple practices.

Outcomes by business type do show some variations in how complaints invoking practices from different areas of the sector interact with the OCCS: This year we saw a higher proportion of complaints from multiple practices supported with preliminary mediation and resolved through advice at that stage than in previous years. This is also a higher proportion when compared with independent practice complaint outcomes.

The resolution rates in the final mediation phase of the OCCS process are also higher for practices in larger, multiple groups than in complaints involving independent practices.

Please appendix 4 for full details.

Regional complaint activity



The OCCS provides complaint resolution for optical complaints arising across the UK. The service has handled complaints from all four nations during 2024-25 which is closer to the national population distribution compared with previous years.

The service continues to engage with stakeholders across the UK to ensure national awareness and to enable the OCCS team to remain fully informed of UK variations in pathways and NHS interactions.

OVERALL INSIGHTS

Price Sensitivity

In the context of an ongoing cost-of-living crisis, price sensitivity has become an overarching theme that ties together the trends and data we've observed across the OCCS. When household budgets are squeezed or consumer confidence more fragile, every purchase, especially healthcare-adjacent products like eyewear, comes under intense scrutiny. Consumers are less inclined to accept "reasonable" industry outcomes and more likely to challenge any expense they perceive as unjustified.

This heightened focus on value is reflected in several key metrics: overall complaint volumes fell by 4.33% year-on-year as consumers seem to reserve formal complaints for issues they deem truly significant; prescription-error concerns rose from 183 to 230, suggesting that even minor perceived inaccuracies in a paid-for service prompt formal challenge; meanwhile, misdiagnosis complaints have almost halved over two years, indicating both improved clinical standards and perhaps greater consumer selectivity about when to engage the complaints process, along with improved communication in practice.

Price sensitivity also influences how consumers access the OCCS. Digital channels saw robust usage, yet email and phone inquiries dropped markedly, an indicator that consumers are using the website's self-service guidance to resolve questions quickly, without incurring further costs (time or potentially paid-for legal advice). The sharp reduction in "consumer not to pursue" cases—from 10% to 9%—underscores that those who do engage expect tangible value: an apology, a refund, or service adjustment.

Behind the scenes, the OCCS's 86% resolution rate and a steady median resolution time with the 14-day timeline, demonstrate a commitment to cost-efficient, high-quality outcomes. By combining data-driven insight with flexible mediation techniques, the service supports both consumers and practices under pressure to control costs while maintaining satisfaction. Ultimately, as price sensitivity continues to shape consumer behaviour, the OCCS's role in delivering swift, fair, and transparent resolutions has never been more critical to sustaining trust and value in optical care.

Complaints involving online suppliers

In the last two years, the OCCS has received 75 complaints relating to online suppliers. The OCCS has been unable to assist in 55% of those complaints, as the businesses were not regulated and we could not trace a GOC registrant's involvement. In around one third of complaints, the OCCS did assist with advice and helped the consumer to raise their complaint with the provider. 5% of consumers did not proceed further, and we were able to mediate 9% of complaints (with 5 successfully resolved and 1 concluding without resolution).

The OCCS has analysed the status of the online providers as it is likely that online sales will continue to increase. Key points to note are:

- 24 businesses (which were linked to 51 of the complaints) are registered in the UK. In 19 complaints, the OCCS were unable to identify a GOC registrant.
- There is no GOC registrant involvement in 6 of the UK businesses. These 6 businesses account for 19 complaints.
- 3 businesses were based outside the UK (Germany, India and Australia) and represented 4 complaints.

The OCCS will continue to share insight on this area of activity with the GOC to feed into the consultation and review of business regulation. It is noted that regulation of businesses registered outside the UK may not be possible, subject to the details and requirements for businesses to be regulated by the GOC based on activity rather than business title.

Some providers are owned or linked to optical business that already interact with the OCCS. The OCCS is seeking to develop channels of communication with online providers to gain a greater understanding of their structure and willingness or ability to engage with the OCCS. The OCCS will continue developing these relationships and encourage the streamlining of complaint resolution in line with in-store best practice pending the updates to business regulation.

Consumer awareness of the redress and regulation could be a subject covered by OCCS insight sharing and consumer facing activity to assist consumers in making informed choice when selecting a provider.

Communication in Clinical Complaints

The root cause and primary issue in clinical-related complaints has consistently been communication and misaligned understanding of the risk, need for treatment or referral and counselling consumers to aid understanding and the clinical progression of the condition. This once again demonstrates the need and benefits of developing professional confidence and expertise in this area, which minimises unnecessary patient anxiety and professional resilience, a cornerstone of OCCS CPD provision.

For over two years, the OCCS has worked closely with the sector to deliver many CPD session around the criticality of effective communication in the emerging field of myopia management. It is to the great credit of those eye healthcare professionals working in this area that we have seen almost no complaints relating to myopia management. Indeed, in the low number of complaints referred to the OCCS, the concern related to the myopia being reversed. The concerns appeared to be linked to an overminused prescription at an earlier point. This may be something for ECPs (Eye Care Professionals) to be wary of at initial prescribing.   That said new research published in The American Journal of Ophthalmology (Vol 269 P60-68) has identified the best time to treat myopia is before the child becomes myopic and, as such, the issues of overminused prescriptions becomes somewhat moot.

OCT and tech interpretation

One area to note is the continuing trend of complaints relating to the interpretation of OCT scans. It is essential that registrants maintain their skills in this area of clinical practice. This is particularly important for mobile or locum practitioners who may use different models of OCT on a regular basis. It is a registrant's responsibility to make sure they are familiar with the equipment, and competent in the analysis of their OCT scans.

The OCCS is considering whether there is an opportunity to use the OCCS platform to highlight consumer expectations and complaint insight to inform discussions the scope of the NHS eye examination and sight test.

Domiciliary

As highlighted in previous annual reports, the OCCS continues to monitor complaints involving in domiciliary eye health care.

The complaints involving domiciliary eye healthcare received by the OCCS dropped from 98 in 2023-24 to 53 this year. This returns activity in this area to a level more consistent with 2022-23 (42) after a significant increase last year (98). Activity does remain around 40% higher than the average between 2021-2023, 32 per year).

It is noted that consumers in these complaints are more likely not to pursue their complaint through to mediation (13% compared with 10% overall). This will be an area of analysis and focus for the OCCS in the coming year as it is essential that consumers accessing care in this way are supported to raise concerns and seek resolution when necessary. Analysis suggests this data may be impacted by circumstances where residential care home managers raise concerns on behalf of residents and may not then continue for various reasons including staff turnover. The OCCS has liaised with care home providers as part of outreach and awareness activities, as well as in individual complaints to improve and maintain access and engagement.

We continue to develop relationships and raise awareness of the service in this sector and with consumer representatives/support organisations to reduce barriers to complaining through improved awareness and access to the OCCS. Consumer accessing eye healthcare in their homes may be vulnerable, and both the

OCCS and the sector more widely need to be vigilant in all areas of practice and conduct. We welcome the significant reduction in complaints in this area but continue to monitor and share intelligence with the General Optical Council and the NHS where we identify potential concerns about conduct or professionalism. This is important to ensure there is a feedback loop and cross-organisational awareness of what can appear to be isolated, low-level issues when not seen in the wider context.

Commercial Pressure & Workplace Culture

There has been considerable interest in workplace culture, as well as commercial pressure this year. Data from the extensive OCCS database shows a reduction in complaints where the substantive issue is an allegation of overselling from 18 to 14. This now represents less than 1% of OCCS workload.

We continue to see very challenging impact due to the financial pressures on household incomes and practice operating costs, which result in both parties to a complaint being more financially aware and focused on this time. We will support the GOC's work in this area through ongoing insight sharing and analysis of qualitative responses.

CONSUMER INSIGHT

The OCCS has prioritised efforts to enhance accessibility for individuals who may require adjustments or tailored support to engage fully with the service. Further information on these initiatives can be found in the appendix.

As part of its impartial mediation process, the OCCS does not collect Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) data relating to individual optical professionals. This is because complaints are typically handled at a practice level, rather than focusing on one-to-one interactions with specific staff members. Mediation is framed around the relationship between the consumer and the optical practice as a whole, ensuring a fair and balanced approach to resolving concerns.

This year, the OCCS has been developing further relationships with consumer stakeholders and representative groups. Public-facing initiatives are planned for 2025-26 and beyond, which will seek to raise the awareness of the OCCS. The aim is for consumers to feel empowered to raise dissatisfaction and to escalate their concerns to the OCCS if matters are not resolved to their satisfaction. It is noted that consumers deciding not to progress into mediation is slightly higher amongst consumers raising concerns about domiciliary care. This will be closely monitored by the OCCS, and steps will be taken to improve access and engagement.

Evaluating and improving accessibility for all consumers and optical professionals is a strategic objective for the OCCS. Over the past 12 months, the OCCS has been developing relationships with key contacts in consumer stakeholder groups and with groups who can support consumers who may be less inclined to raise a concern or to contact the OCCS. Plans for activity during 2025-26 are developing with some focused collaborations with national charities to also assist with 4 nations variations in terms of NHS care and availability of care.

REFLECTIONS OF THE OCCS TEAM

We have seen complaints relating to the diagnosis of cataracts increase this year, with consumers expressing concerns about the condition's impact on their ocular health and lifestyle. In these complaints, it appears that there is often a misinterpretation or misunderstanding of what a cataract is, its current stage, and its progression. This seems to lead to increased anxiety and the consumer seeking a second opinion, often incurring additional consultation fees. Recognising that a consumer may be unfamiliar with these conditions is important. There should be an opportunity to ask questions and be reassured during their visit. It is vital that the consumer feels confident and comfortable returning to the practice should they have any concerns.

We do continue to see Domiciliary complaints and inquiries from vulnerable people, the elderly or disabled, living alone or in care homes, although fewer than in the previous year. They often describe feeling isolated and unheard and seek more effective and prompt communication from the practice. Frequently, we hear that consumers think something hasn't been explained clearly to them or their own needs or vulnerabilities had not been taken into account. Domiciliary visits can be challenging, and consumer feedback suggests that allowing extra time to process information, providing clear written information, and offering supportive aftercare will enhance consumer satisfaction and understanding.

A consistent trend over the last few years shows that the cost-of-living situation continues to impact consumers and their expectations of a reasonable offer to resolve the complaint."

Rachael Brennan, Resolution Manager

"I, personally, had just not fully understood the incredible value OCCS brings to consumers as well as registrants, how amazing and effective the mediators are and the potential that OCCS CPD has to enhance consumer journeys through their optical experiences.

I am also now aware of the importance of continuing to strengthen the relationship with GOC, it is clear that by taking 27% of GOC queries away from them, is beneficial all round, ensuring the GOC fulfils its responsibilities more effectively and registrants know that only appropriate investigations remain in the GOC process, maintaining and nurturing the trust of this relationship is very important"

Paul Chapman Hatchett, Clinical Advisor

Stakeholders and Engagement

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Professional bodies and NHS

We continue to host annual review meetings with key sector stakeholders, including the NHS and large employers, to share insights and facilitate action to improve consumer outcomes. Building on this established and valued series of meetings, we have developed this to ensure up-to-date knowledge of NHS pathways and engage with four nations stakeholders so as to ensure the OCCS is tuned in to the diverging agendas impacting practices across the UK. This has enabled us to understand local variance better and shape our interventions accordingly.

Consumer organisations

During 2024-25 the OCCS has been building and strengthening relationships with a range of consumer bodies and representative groups in order to raise the profile of the service and to obtain their input to our process and insight sharing to benefit the consumer groups they represent. This has focused on organisations that represent consumers more likely to be vulnerable either for situational or characteristic reasons.

This activity has included contact and information sharing with care home providers and representatives to support our wider work and individual resolutions in domiciliary eye health care complaints.

These activities will continue in 2025-26 and beyond, where discussions and plan, this year will lead to more public-facing activity.

Insight sharing – Developing a learning culture & driving improvement

We delivered a record 75 CPD sessions in 2024-25 to thousands of registrants with consistently high feedback (range from 96 to 100%). We are delighted to see a post-pandemic movement by many of our CPD partners away from online delivery to increasingly in person events.

We continue to deliver CPD content at national industry conferences such as 100% Optical, National Optometric Conference & Association of Optometrists events as well as large corporate sector events to sustain our profile and carry the message of FTP change & improvement to educate and engagingly reassure registrants, receiving overwhelmingly positive feedback. The reassurance we can give registrants that the sword of Damocles is not an ever-present threat to them, and this is always well received (unsurprisingly!). This helps registrants to understand the GOC’s work to deliver compassionate regulation.

We continue to work in partnership with many and varied organisations to create & deliver new CPD content. This year, we have stepped up our work co-creating and delivering CPD content with FtP team to disseminate insights, themes, and trends from historical FtP cases to frontline practitioners. We have also broadened the CPD proposition this year into IP and tele-optometry sectors and continued our contribution to post reg Paediatric optometry programme.

Last year we reported on our creation of a Year Two customer care/complaint management/ communication skills module with a UK Optometry Undergraduate Programme and our willingness to make this available to UK undergraduate programmes. Disappointingly, only the original University who initiated this work have used this module. The OCCS is looking to build bigger relationships with UK academic institutions in the future.

The above project also aligns with an initiative to work collaboratively with the GOC FtP team in delivering awareness and insight sessions to students. There are currently plans to launch these in 2025/26 academic year so more information on the sessions and their impact will be shared next year.

DIGITAL ACTIVITY

Website – opticalcomplaints.co.uk

- Number of visits: 27,510
- Number of new visits: 27,284
- Most popular pages:
  - 'The right to a refund' blog
  - Home
  - Contact us
  - FAQs
  - Returns and spectacles blog
- Time spent: Average engagement time 1m 09s

Social Media

Using platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) offered the Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS) a range of strategic benefits in reaching and engaging its diverse audience.

LinkedIn provides a professional environment ideal for connecting with optical professionals, practice managers, and industry stakeholders. Through LinkedIn, the OCCS continues to share thought leadership articles, insights from annual reports, and updates on complaint resolution strategies as well as CPD events. This helped reinforce the OCCS's role as a trusted authority in the optical sector, fostering both professional engagement and collaboration.

We are looking to build our profile on LinkedIn. We will be having our first CPD promotion on Insta & TikTok. We are also encouraging registrants to spread the word of our CPD events through the various WhatsApp groups they are part of.

We are also looking to see if we can develop more trust of the OCCS (& GOC) though direct contact with registrants, as well continuing to use current offerings through multiples, small chains, and LOC's

Facebook serves as a valuable platform for directly reaching the public and consumers directly. Its broad user base and community-focused nature make it ideal for promoting eye health awareness, sharing consumer-friendly advice (e.g. spotting signs of eye conditions), and encouraging dialogue around complaint processes. Features such as comments, shares, and events allow OCCS to foster trust and accessibility among service users.

X (Twitter) is especially useful for real-time updates, raising awareness around national campaigns (such as World Cancer Day), and highlighting key developments like report releases or partnerships. Its brevity and fast pace make it ideal for bite-sized content and sharing links to deeper resources on the OCCS website.

By actively using all three platforms, the OCCS ensures it maintains a strong presence across both professional and public spheres, supporting education, transparency, and dialogue while enhancing its visibility and impact across the optical sector.

AND FINALLY....

The OCCS cannot provide an update on 2024-25 without recognising the huge contribution made over the last 10 years by our clinical advisor, Richard Edwards.

Richard joined the OCCS team in 2014, when Nockolds was appointed to deliver the OCCS by the General Optical Council after a strategic introduction at Optrafair in London. Richard has been instrumental in developing the OCCS into the effective and successful service that it is today. In helping consumers and practices to resolve some of our most complex and protracted complaints, Richard had deployed his vast experience in optics to improve the outcomes for so many individual complainants and practice teams. In addition to this, Richard has worked extensively with OCCS colleagues, the GOC team, and stakeholders to evolve a more proportionate and continuous improvement-based approach to complaints and concerns, which has had, and will continue to have a positive impact on the lives of optical professionals and patients for many years to come. Richard's work with the GOC around acceptance criteria, the remodelling of FtP triage and identifying early trends and potential communication 'hot spots' such as in myopia management has contributed to optics regulation being seen as forward looking and agile. The CPD outreach work Richard has delivered over the last 10 years means the OCCS insight has been shared with thousands of optical professionals. This has enabled the OCCS to share the AERO © complaint framework and improve the understanding and confidence in effective complaint resolution as well as the role of the GOC as a regulator.

Jennie Jones, Head of the OCCS shares her reflections on working with Richard:

"Working with Richard and witnessing first-hand the impact he has had on the sector is one of the highlights of my professional career so far. Richard is indeed a 'special one' in that he combines humour, warmth with strategic intellect that always keeps the end in mind and people at the centre. I will miss working alongside Richard's wisdom, his football analogies as well as the focus and drive that are part of Richard's DNA. Thank you, Richard, from all of us at the OCCS, all the consumers and practice colleagues that you have interacted with and stakeholder colleagues. We have all benefited hugely from your work in optics not only over the last decade, but across a long and successful career. Thank you for the parting gift of helping us to introduce Paul Chapman-Hatchett to the OCCS Clinical Advisor Role. Enjoy some well-deserved fun!"

The OCCS would like to wish Richard a long, happy and fun filled retirement.

Conclusion

Altogether, the OCCS's current strategy effectively addresses the informational needs of both consumers and optical professionals. By focusing on eye health education, complaint resolution, professional development, and sector innovation, the OCCS reinforces its role as a pivotal resource in the optical industry. The service continues to look to the future, evolving and developing to provide effective complaint resolution and upstreaming, as required for the delivery of eye healthcare and regulation of optical professionals over the next five to ten years and beyond.

OCCS objectives 2025-26

1. Leverage OCCS data and trends to drive continuous improvement across the optical sector, providing clear, evidence-based insight that informs best practice and enhances complaint resolution strategies.

2. Continue to support the GOC in embedding and evolving efficient, fair, and proportionate case-handling processes, ensuring alignment with PSA performance standards and strengthening public confidence in regulatory outcomes.

3. Enhance the accessibility and inclusivity of OCCS services for all users, with a specific focus on those who are neurodiverse, have disabilities, or made vulnerable due to their circumstances, to ensure equitable access to mediation and fair complaint outcomes.

4. Contribute to the continued development and practical implementation of business regulation in optics, engaging with the GOC's strategic aims and to support clarity, compliance, and the role of regulation in complaint management.

5. To increase CPD training and upstreaming work across the sector, to include complaint handling, key themes and trends and improving registrant understanding of the role of the regulator and the optical complaints landscape.

   This will include an analysis of the impact of the outreach work to raise the OCCS profile.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1

OCCS process

The OCCS uses mediation techniques to help consumers and optical practices to resolve consumer complaints

Further details are available online at opticalcomplaints.co.uk or by contacting a member of the OCCS team

1

Remit
The complaint circumstances are reviewed to ensure the matter falls within the OCCS remit. If outside remit, the consumer is signposted with advice. FtP allegations are referred to the GOC.

2

Supporting local resolution
If the practice's complaint procedure has not been exhausted, the OCCS will assist with preliminary mediation and de-escalation. The complaint may be resolved with advice or referred back to the practice for resolution.

3

Consumer
If the practice complaint process is exhausted, the consumer confirms they wish to proceed and signs Agreement to Mediate (consent and GDPR)

4

Mediation
Matter assigned to a resolution manager for shuttle mediation. Practice contacted and provides relevant information including records and payment details

5

Resolution
Agreement is reached and confirmed in Mediation Agreement if appropriate.

6

Feedback
All service users are asked to share feedback on their experience and the outcome

7

APPENDIX 2 - OUTCOMES

All	2024- 25	2023-24	2024-25 % (all)	2045-25 % in remit
Out of remit	**86**	**125**	**5%**	**-**
Phase A- Supporting Local Resolution	**1023**	**1067**	**62%**	**65%**
Referred to practice	550	485	33%	35%
Concluded with advice	473	582	29%	30%
Client not to pursue	**167**	**190**	**10%**	**11%**
Resolved on mediation	**241**	**275**	**15%**	**15%**
Concluded without a resolution	**49**	**73**	**2%**	**3%**
Practice Advice	**91**	**70**	**6%**	**6%**
Grand total closed complaints	**1657**	**1800**	**100%**	**1571**

Outcomes of GOC Referrals

	Outcome
Phase A: Supporting Local Resolution	**53.8%**
Refer to practice	36.6%
Advice Only	17.2%
Client not to pursue	**25.8%**
Resolved on mediation	**18.3%**
Concluded without a resolution	**2.2%**
Grand total	**100%**

APPENDIX 3- NATURE OF COMPLAINT

	2024-25	2024-25%
Charges	73	4.3%
Customer Care	522	31.1%
Goods and Services	752	44.8%
Other	86	5.1%
Practice Advice	61	3.6%
Product	185	11.0%
Grand total of received complaints	1679	100%

SUB-CATEGORY OF COMPLAINT

	2024- 25	2023-24	2022-23
Goods and service	752	**706**	**658**
Cataract	23	7	2
Concerns with the examination	70	45	42
Dispense of Varifocal	57	76	112
Dispensing	145	142	118
Error with prescription	207	213	184
Eye Test	37	6	7
Missed diagnosis	48	34	44
Outcome of laser eye surgery	44	42	40
Outcome of lens replacement surgery	39	37	25
Prescription prescribed in one practice and dispensed in another	53	73	44
Reglaze- issues with consumers own frame	12	8	13
Unknown	17	23	27
Customer Care	**522**	**532**	**468**
After care	13	23	20
Alleged inappropriate selling	20	21	19
Attitude	51	60	68

Complaint Handling	75	59	58
Consumer Change of mind	28	22	23
Delay in supply	52	94	53
Dispensing Optician Customer Care	77	4	2
Excluded from store	2	2	6
Failure to deal with concerns/complaint	107	137	92
Laser surgery- complaint handling	12	8	9
NHS Voucher Query	7	15	26
No prescription Provided	7	18	17
Non-qualified staff issues	1	3	4
Optometrist customer care	58	48	52
Pupillary Distance- entitlement	3	2	2
Unknown	8	16	17
Product	**185**	**147**	**104**
Contact lenses	25	8	5
Product- frames	96	97	68
Product- lens coating	12	19	19
Product- lenses	37	20	8
Unknown	12	1	1
Varifocals- quality	3	2	3
Other	**86**	**81**	**98**
Miscellaneous	68	74	92
Practitioner Query	2	1	1
Prescription- content	3	1	-
Unknown-	13	5	5
Charges	**73**	**76**	**97**
Charges and offers	73	74	94
Unknown	-	2	3
Practice Advice	**61**	**54**	**55**
Unknown	**-**	**160**	**148**
Grand total	**1679**	**1755**	**1628**

APPENDIX 4- BUSINESS TYPES

Complaint Nature	Independent	Multiple/Franchise/JVP
Goods & Service	22%	78%
Customer Care	21%	79%
Product	26%	74%
Other	17%	83%
Charges	19%	81%
Practice Advice	52%	48%

Outcomes (all)	Independent	Multiples (inc Franchises and JVPs)	Outcome
Out Of Remit	4%	3%	3%
Practice Advice	6%	3%	3%
Supporting local resolution (total)	54%	64%	64%
- with advice	19%	27%	37%
- with guidance and referral to practice	35%	37%	27%
Consumer not to Pursue	10%	9%	9%
Resolved on mediation	19%	18%	19%
Mediation concluded without a resolution	7%	3%	3%
Grand Total	**100%**	**100%**	

APPENDIX 5 – CONSUMER EDI DATA

AGE	OCCS 2024-25	OCCS 2023-24	Comparison with National Data
16-24	4%	2%	11.7%
25-34	11%	7%	13.5%
35-44	11%	13%	13%
45-55	22%	20%	13.3%
55-64	23%	28%	12.6%
65 or over	28%	29%	18.5%
Under 16	1%	1%	20.8%

GENDER	OCCS 2024-25	OCCS 2023-24	Comparison with National Data
Female	61%	60%	50.4%
Male	37%	40%	49.2%
Non-Binary	1%	0%	0.4%

DISABILITY	OCCS 2024-25	OCCS 2023-24	Comparison with National Data
No	72%	76%	82.2%
Yes	28%	24%	17.8%

ETHNICITY	OCCS 2024-25	OCCS 2023-24	Comparison with National Data
Asian	9%	14%	9.3%
Black	3%	4%	4.0%
Mixed	3%	3%	2.9%
Other	5%	4%	2.1%
White	81%	75%	81.7%

SEXUAL ORIENTATION	OCCS 2024- 25	OCCS 2023-24	Comparison with National Data
Bisexual	1%	2%	2%
Gay	3%	2%	2.7%
Heterosexual	90%	94%	93.6%
Other	6%	2%	1.7%
Prefer not to say	0%	0%	Not a category in ONS Census

MARITAL STATUS	OCCS 2024- 25	OCCS 2023-24	Comparison with National Data
Married	46%	51%	40.7%
Single	32%	26%	47.5%
Divorced	6%	9%	6.6%
Widowed	7%	6%	0.1%
Civil Partnership	3%	2%	4.9%
Separated	1%	2%	Not a category in ONS Census
Prefer not to say	5%	4%	Not a category in ONS Census

RELIGION	OCCS 2024-25	OCCS 2023-24	Comparison with National Data
Buddhist	2%	0%	0.5%
Christian	48%	48%	46.2%
Hindu	2%	4%	1.7%
Muslim	6%	8%	6.5%
None	24%	29%	37.2%
Other	4%	4%	0.6%
Prefer not to Say	12%	6%	6.0%
Sikh	1%	1%	0.9%
Jewish	1%	0%	0.5%

REGION	OCCS 2024-25	OCCS 2023-24	Comparison with National Data
Wales	4%	3%	5%
Scotland	7%	6%	8%
England	88%	91%	84%
Northern Ireland	1%	0%	3%

APPENDIX 6 – SERVICE USER FEEDBACK

	2024-25	2023- 24
Response Rate %	12%	14%
/10		
How well did we understand your concerns	8.8/10	8.8/10
How satisfied were you with the outcome	8.3/10	7.6/10
How satisfied were you with the process	8.8/10	7.6/10
Easy to contact OCCS	9.1/10	9.4/10
How would you rate your overall experience	8.7/10	8.7/10
%		
Would you recommend OCCS to others	91%	87%
Would use OCCS again	94%	86%
Would use ADR again	91%	86%
Consider OCCS to be:		
Fair	80%	67%
Helpful & Efficient	93%	90%
Productive	85%	76%