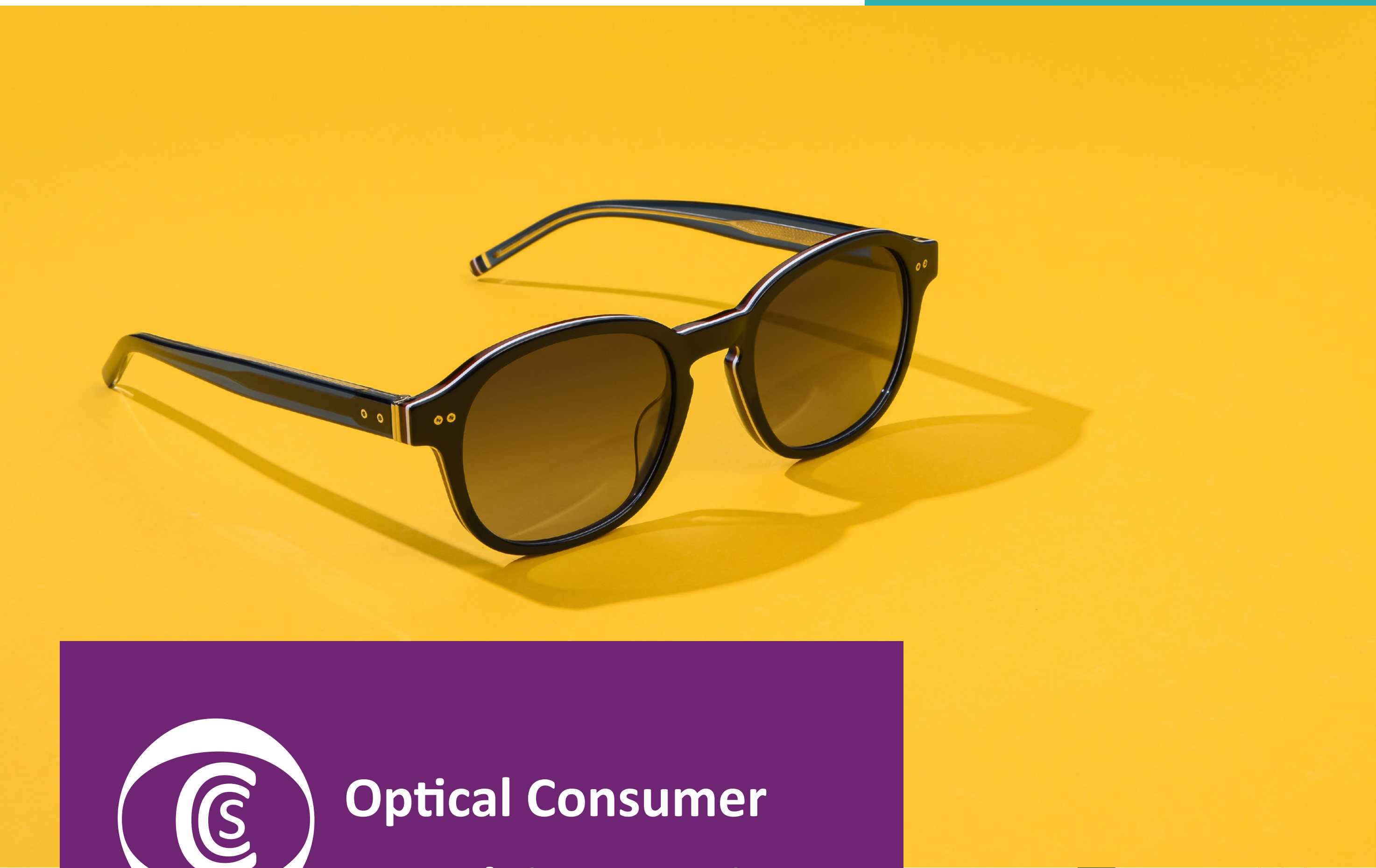


Optical Consumer Complaints Service

Resolving with Confidence

Annual Report 2025-26

Contents

Introduction

The 2025-26 reporting year has been one of significant growth, strengthened collaboration, and continued evolution for the Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS). Complaint volumes increased from 1,679 to 2,201 cases, being a 31% rise reflecting both heightened consumer awareness of the OCCS and growing confidence among practices in the value of independent mediation. Despite this increase, the nature and tone of complaints remained broadly consistent, with clinical care, communication, aftercare, and cost-related concerns continuing to dominate.

+31%
2201 TOTAL CASES

The OCCS maintained strong performance across all key indicators. Overall, 143 enquiries were redirected from the GOC, representing 23.3% of all enquiries received by the regulator. This was not only the highest number of referrals the OCCS has ever received from the GOC, but it also reflected a significant change in how referrals are now made.

The GOC has adopted a more proactive and agile direct referral pathway, enabling consumer concerns to be identified earlier and creating the best opportunity for them to be addressed at the earliest possible stage. This direct referral pathway now accounts for over 55% of the 143 referrals received by the OCCS, an increase of 15% compared with last year.

The remaining cases continue to be discussed at biweekly meetings between the GOC and the OCCS. In addition to improving the overall consumer journey, this approach has helped to ensure that regulatory resources are focused more effectively and proportionately.

+52%
MEDIATIONS

The year also saw a substantial increase in mediated cases, rising from 296 to 450, representing a 52% increase. This growth was driven by clearer consumer expectations alongside increasingly complex case presentations.

Despite this increase in both volume and complexity, additional staffing capacity enabled the OCCS to improve overall performance, reducing average resolution times from 19.2 to 15.5 days. Resolution times for mediated cases also fell significantly, from 70.6 to 60.7 days, demonstrating improved efficiency while maintaining service standards.

Insights from complaints continued to highlight the importance of clear communication, expectation setting, and robust record-keeping across the patient journey. Complaints about costs and charges rose from 4% to 7%, reflecting broader economic pressures and heightened consumer sensitivity to value.

Cases involving online suppliers increased by 47% during the year. While the vast majority of these cases related to UK-based companies, most did not have a GOC registrant linked to the business.

Sector-specific trends included an increase in concerns relating to laser and clear lens extraction outcomes, with around 30% of these cases requiring mediation. This rise is likely to reflect, at least in part, the strong and trusted relationship the OCCS has developed with the sector.

45 CPD SESSIONS

Prevention and education remained central to the OCCS's mission. The service delivered 45 CPD sessions, reaching registrants across multiple, independent LOCs and locum networks. CPD focused on communication, record keeping, and insights drawn directly from OCCS casework. New upstream initiatives included developing a student webinar for launch in the 2026-27 academic year and new resources for front-of-house teams, recognising their critical role in early complaint management.

Operationally, the OCCS continued to strengthen its infrastructure, invest in new systems, and refine internal processes to support efficiency and responsiveness. Collaboration with the GOC, professional bodies, and sector partners remained a defining feature of the year, underpinning improvements in signposting, insight sharing, and the culture of complaint handling across the profession.

Looking ahead, the OCCS will focus on enhancing accessibility, expanding educational outreach, deepening collaboration with the GOC, and continuing to provide high-quality, timely mediation. The service remains committed to supporting both consumers and practitioners, promoting early resolution, and contributing to a more transparent, communicative, and patient-centred optical sector.

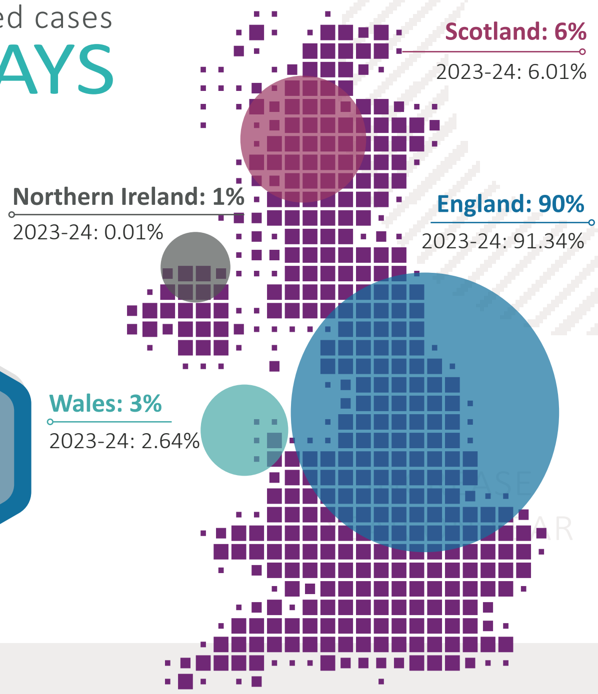
Executive Summary

AN OVERVIEW OF THE OCCS ACTIVITY AND INSIGHT FROM 1 APRIL 2025 TO 31 MARCH 2026

CASES RECEIVED	YoY INCREASE	MEDIATIONS	RESOLUTION RATE
2201	**+31%**	**450**	**86%**

Average resolution time
15.5 DAYS

Average mediated cases
60.7 DAYS



RESOLUTION PERFORMANCE

19% Reduction in overall resolution time

22% Reduction in mediation duration

3% Cases ended without resolution

NATURE OF COMPLAINT

CLINICAL CARE	45%
CUSTOMER CARE	39%
PRODUCT	9%
CHARGES	7%

Clinical concerns remained the largest category, typically related to the examination process, perceived diagnostic issues, the communication of clinical findings, and situations in which no prescription was issued.

1. 31% INCREASE IN ACTIVITY

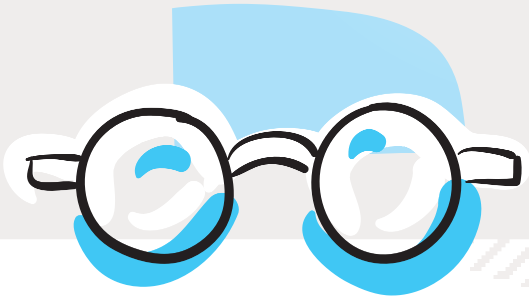
2025-26 was the busiest OCCS year to date, with much of the increase seen in full mediation support, where complaints had exhausted the local complaints process. The OCCS concluded 69% more mediations in the last 12 months than in 2024-25, whilst maintaining a resolution rate of 86%. This is consistent with complaint activity in other sectors. Mediation by the OCCS continues to be effective in resolving the concerns raised, making the insight captured even more valuable in supporting the consumer relationship between patients and optical teams.

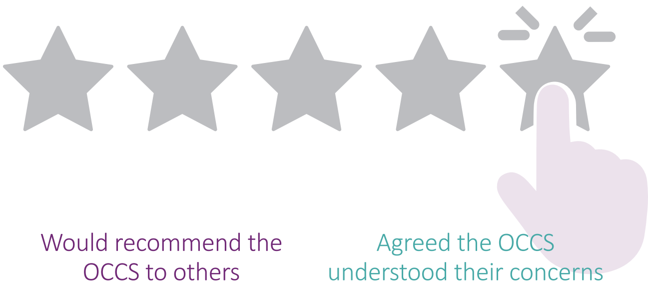
2. INCREASE IN CUSTOMER CARE (+67%) AND COST RELATED COMPLAINTS (+210%)

The increase in complaints directly linked to the customer experience (appropriate selling, delays in supply, and after care) contributed to the overall increase in activity during 2025-26. This increase has been attributed to changing consumer expectations around how complaints are resolved and the use of AI to facilitate raising complaints and in deciding whether to accept a resolution proposed by the optical business.

3. LENS REPLACEMENT & CATARACTS

Complaints relating to lens replacement surgery and cataract issues accounted for the greater increase in clinical/goods & services-related issues referred to the OCCS, rising from 116 to 273, being a 135% increase.





FEEDBACK

Would recommend the OCCS to others	Agreed the OCCS understood their concerns	Found the OCCS to be helpful	Would use OCCS again
91%	93%	91%	91%

High levels of **consumer satisfaction** during 2025-26 **reflect confidence** in OCCS support and resolution.

Feedback gathered during 2025-26 indicates that consumers continue to value the OCCS as a supportive, accessible and independent route to resolving disputes.

A recurring theme is that the OCCS is sometimes the only route consumers feel is available to make progress, particularly where provider responses are slow.

Economic Climate and Its Impact on Consumers

The economic environment throughout 2025 and into 2026 continued to present significant challenges for consumers across the UK. Although inflationary pressures eased compared with earlier periods, overall consumer confidence remained subdued. Rising living costs, ongoing concerns around household finances, and uncertainty about future economic conditions continued to influence consumer behaviour and decision-making.

For many households, essential expenditure such as housing, energy, food, and transport continued to squeeze disposable income. As a result, discretionary spending remained constrained, particularly for lower and middle-income consumers. Even where economic indicators showed modest improvement, this was not consistently reflected in consumers' perceptions of their own financial resilience or ability to absorb unexpected costs.

In this context, affordability remained a key consideration for consumers seeking optical care. While eye examinations and clinical services are widely regarded as essential, consumers paid closer attention to the associated costs of spectacles, lenses, contact lenses, and optional or enhanced services. The OCCS observed increased sensitivity regarding pricing, value for money, and transparency of charges, as reflected in a rise in complaints about costs, fees, and perceived gaps between initial expectations and final prices.

At the same time, expectations of service quality remained consistently high. Consumers increasingly expect clear communication, transparent pricing, and reliable standards of care throughout the entire optical journey, from clinical assessment and dispensing through to aftercare and follow up. In a context of financial pressure, service dissatisfaction appeared to have a heightened impact; where outcomes fell short of expectations or communication was perceived as unclear, consumers were more likely to escalate their concerns.

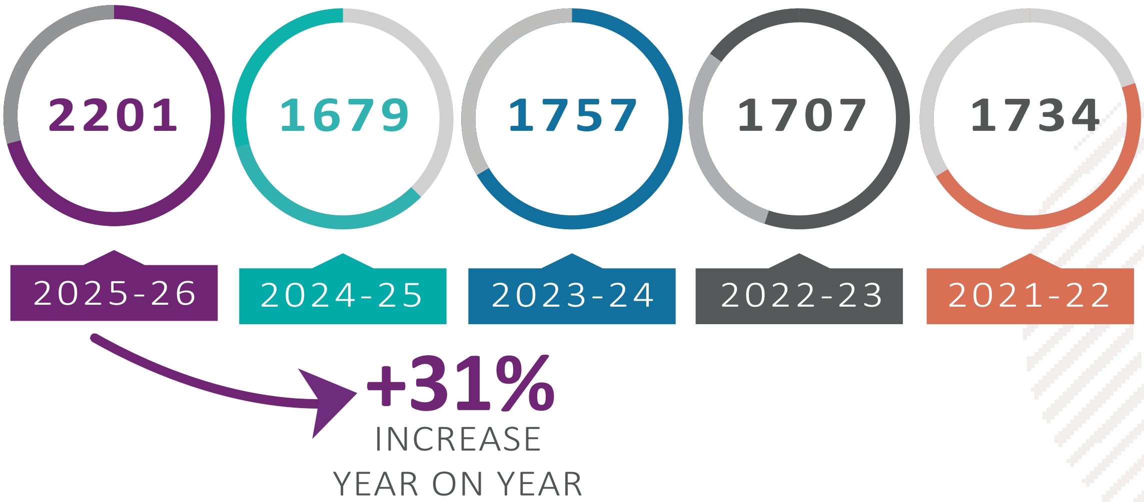
This economic backdrop also contributed to a shift in how consumers articulate complaints. The OCCS observed more defined, specific expectations regarding resolution, including clearer views on remedies, refunds, and corrective action. While digital tools and increased access to information have supported consumer awareness of rights and redress options, they have also, at times, contributed to unrealistic expectations around outcomes, particularly in more complex or clinically nuanced cases.

Overall, the economic climate during 2025-26 shaped not only the volume of complaints received by the OCCS but also their content and complexity. Affordability pressures, combined with high expectations of service quality and value, reinforced the importance of early communication, transparent pricing, and effective local complaint handling within optical practices. Against this backdrop, the OCCS continued to play a critical role in providing proportionate, independent support to both consumers and practices, helping to navigate disputes constructively and maintain confidence in the optical sector.

OCCS Activity 2025-26

OVERALL DEMAND

During 2025-26, the Optical Consumers Complaints Service experienced a significant increase in demand, with 2,201 cases received, compared with 1,679 cases in 2024-25. This represents a 31% year on year increase in overall case volumes.



The sustained growth in demand reflects both increased consumer awareness of the service and rising levels of engagement across the optical sector, underscoring the continued importance of proportionate case handling, targeted resolution, and effective referral pathways.

Analysis also suggests that the use of AI is assisting consumers to raise complaints when they may previously not felt able or have time to do so. The overwhelming majority of patients in the optical sector receive high class eye healthcare and are optical professionals are amongst the most trusted professionals. Research indicates that across healthcare, only a minority of dissatisfied patients will raise a complaint[1]. While optical eye healthcare is unique in being a well established healthcare/retail sector, it is likely that not all consumers have felt able or willing to raise complaints with the optical business.

Early indications, both in optics and other sectors, suggest that AI is facilitating consumers to articulate their complaints. The OCCS is monitoring and analysing the impact in terms of volumes, how complaints are presented and resolution. At this stage, there are some impacts that need to be explored further such as disproportionate escalation, complaints becoming more legalistic and supporting consumers to enter more meaningful and relevant prompts to produce more accurate and proportionate content and responses. The OCCS, as part of Nockolds Resolution is undertaking further analysis in this area and hosting a roundtable event in 2026 to explore the impacts of AI and solutions to improve the positive outputs of its use.

[1] Healthwatch yougov poll 2025 https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/report/2025-01-27/pain-complain-why-its-time-fix-nhs-complaints-process

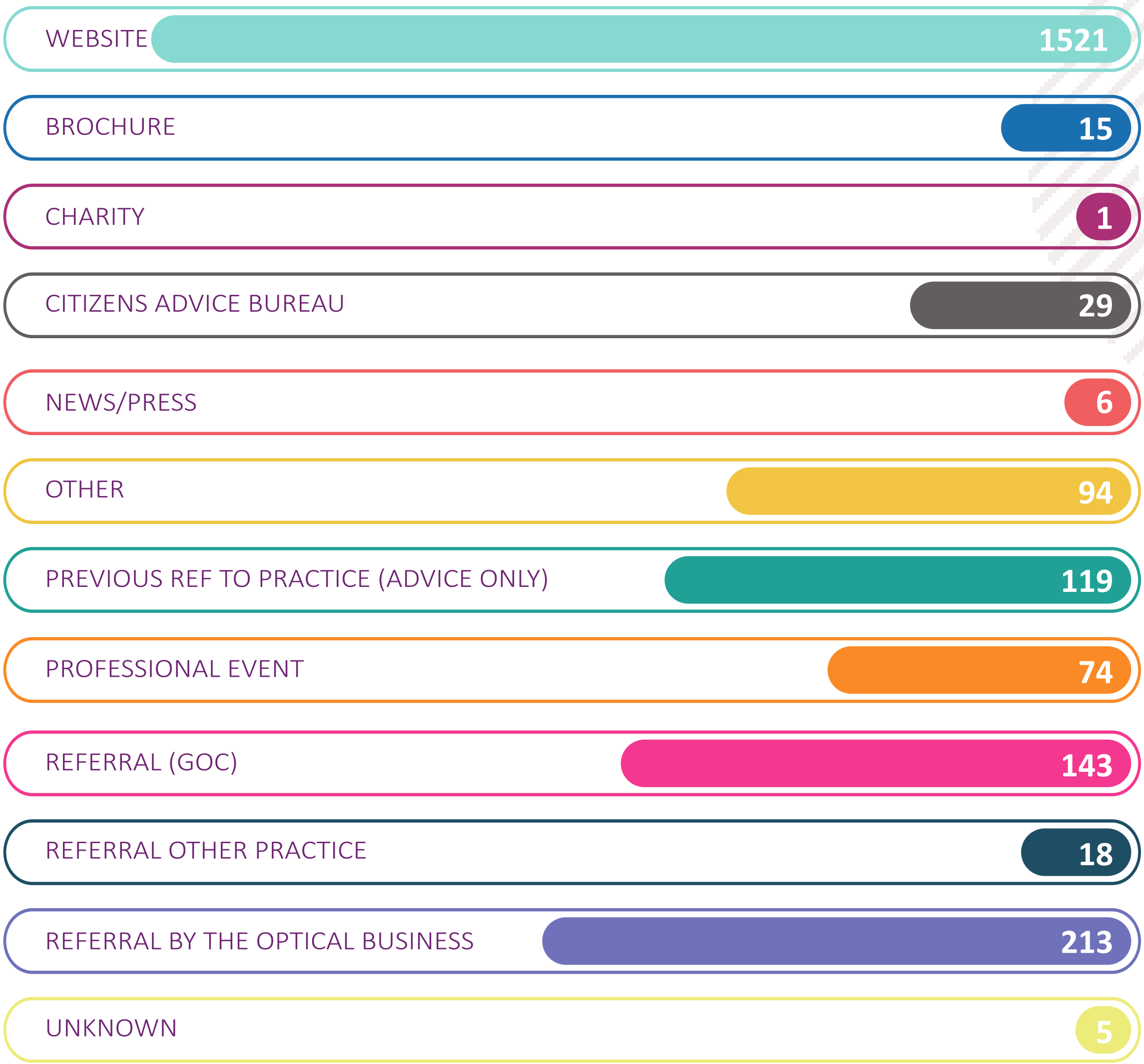
CASE PROGRESSION AND OUTCOMES

Alongside the increase in cases received, there was a material rise in cases progressing beyond initial assessment:

- Mediated cases increased from 296 to 450, representing a 52% year on year increase
- Full complaint mediation is provided in a fifth of all cases. This is consistent with previous years (18% in 2024-25, and 20% this year)
- Average time to resolution across all cases fell from 19.2 days to 15.5 days (a 19% reduction)
- Average time to conclude mediated cases reduced from 70.6 days to 60.7 days (a 22% reduction)

At year's end, 132 cases remained open, which will inevitably affect completion time measures in the next reporting period.

SOURCE OF ENQUIRIES TO OCCS



This analysis is based on the information provided by consumers when they contact the OCCS initially. Further analysis confirms that within those who state 'website' as their link to the OCCS, many have been given details of the OCCS by the optical business (within the complaint policy or independently) or via GOC (directly or self-triage via the GOC website).

ACCESS ROUTES AND CONTACT METHODS

Consumers continued to access the OCCS through multiple channels:

- Overall online engagement increased, with online originated cases rising by approximately 47% year on year

The availability of multiple contact methods continues to support accessibility and reduce barriers to engagement for consumers with differing needs and preferences.

KEY DEMAND TRENDS

The overall increase in complaint activity and mediations was accompanied by notable shifts in case characteristics, including:

- An increase in cases relating to clinical concerns, including complaints relating to diagnosis.
- An increase in consumers proceeding with the mediation process following initial conversations and interactions with the OCCS. In recent years, the OCCS had seen an increase in cases where consumers did not continue to engage (10% of consumers in 2024-25). During 2025-26 the OCCS has seen this reverse, with an increase in engagement. There has been a 28% improvement in consumer engagement with 2024-25. The OCCS team have focused on providing consumers with reassurance around the mediation process, the effectiveness and supportive approach of OCCS mediations. This has contributed to the increase and has occurred in the context of a more adversarial complaint landscape with higher consumer expectations.
- There was a small increase in domiciliary-related complaints in absolute terms, although these represented a slightly smaller proportion of total cases compared with the previous year. This may be linked to the ongoing growth in the optical domiciliary sector. The most noticeable change was the nature of complaints, with a marked increase in customer care-related complaints, particularly post-examination. We continue to stress to domiciliary providers the importance of clear transparent prices and communication to help manage expectations and reduce consumer anxiety.

SECTOR ANALYSIS

In 2025-26, complaints referred to the OCCS largely reflected estimated market share in terms of business ownership:

INDEPENDENT	FRANCHISE/JVP	MULTI-SITE CORPORATION	OTHER
22%	31%	45%	2%

ANALYSIS OF MEDIATION, CASE COMPLEXITY AND DISPUTE INTENSITY

Mediation Rates and Patterns

In 2025-26, the OCCS saw a marked increase in cases progressing to mediation, outstripping the overall increase in OCCS activity.

- 450 cases entered mediation, compared with 296 in 2024–25, representing a 52% year on year increase
- Mediation accounted for 20% of all cases received, up from around 18% in the previous year

The growth in mediation volumes indicates not only higher overall demand, but also a greater proportion of cases requiring structured intervention to support resolution. This points to growing complexity in complaint issues, driven by heightened consumer expectations and greater readiness among parties to pursue formal resolution pathways rather than early informal ones.

Despite higher mediation volumes, the OCCS achieved improvements in timeliness:

Average days to conclude mediated cases reduced from 70.6 to 60.7 days

This reduction points to improved process efficiency and triage, which will require increased OCCS resource should the level of activity continue in 2026-27. The OCCS is investing in technology to ensure resources can be focused on the de-escalation and resolution work of the team, which is highly skilled and requires 1-1 contact.

Volume Versus Complexity

The 31% increase in cases received was not evenly distributed across case types or outcomes, suggesting that demand growth was accompanied by a shift in complexity rather than a simple scaling of previous patterns.

Key indicators include:

- Increase in mediations

A higher proportion of the complaints referred to the OCCS had reached the stage where the consumer felt local resolution had been exhausted and the matter needed to be escalated. While some could still be de-escalated and local resolution supported, many required impartial resolution support as the relationship or communication channels had broken down, or the consumer was unwilling to continue direct discussions with the practice as their initial requests had been declined.

- Increase in the more complex complaints linked to clinical themes, including perceived missed diagnosis and examination concerns

Analysis indicated that these complaints are predominantly related to the way the Optometrist communicates to the consumer, with both the diagnosis and management of conditions such as cataracts and discussing changes in prescription. This highlights the importance and challenges when advising consumers about the outcomes of their sight test. The OCCS has up streamed this insight by focusing on communication, ensuring consumer understanding and documenting outcomes within all of our CPD sessions, to support registrants in optimising consumer trust and engagement through the consumer journey and interactions with their practice teams.

An increase in multi-issue and medically material (Myopia Management) cases, rising from 4 to 16. Whilst numerically low, the increase is noticeable. Analysis of these complaints indicates that the consumer concerns are related to the consumer and contractual aspects rather than the effectiveness of the products supplied. For example, not being aware that lost or damaged spectacles would not be replaced, and that the aftercare provision is the practice's commitment to provide additional lenses when prescription changes meet the defined criteria. The OCCS is seeking to work with the sector and providers to make practices aware of the complaint trends we are seeing, and the importance of communication and education.

At the same time, the OCCS recorded:

- Increased consumer engagement in mediation (being a noticeable fall of 28% in cases where the consumer chose not to proceed with mediation)
- Increased use of targeted resolution and signposting, supported by more proactive triage and referral decisions within the wider complaints system

Taken together, this suggests that while a greater number of cases are being assessed and filtered at an earlier stage, those that proceed further are increasingly complex and resource intensive.

Indicators of Dispute Intensity

Several measurable indicators point to higher dispute intensity within a subset of the caseload:

- The absolute number of cases requiring mediation increased sharply, particularly among larger providers
- Resolution rates remained high, and only 3% of complaints concluded their interaction with the OCCS without a resolution. Resolution Managers have shared that complaints appear to escalate at an earlier stage and consumers are less inclined to remain in dialogue with a practice when their requested resolution is not provided. More intensive mediation input is required to achieve a resolution which both parties can agree. The use of AI may also being having an impact as complainants are increasingly referring a complaint response from a business to an open AI model, and the prompts entered will determine the response or analysis provided by the AI. This can then influence the consumer's view and assessment on whether a complaint response is reasonable or acceptable. There have been examples of this unnecessarily escalating a complaint when a reasonable and appropriate response and proposal has been put forward by the practice. In the alternative, there are also examples of where the consumer has been able to articulate the basis of their complaint with more detail and reference to their consumer rights, which the business have then had to take on board. The maintained resolution rates in this climate reflect the OCCS mediation team’s ability to manage consumer expectations at the outset and also the continued trust and support we receive from practices to work with the consumers to find a mutually satisfactory resolution.
- Certain complaint themes (notably diagnostic and clinical concerns) showed stronger growth than product or service-related issues

In addition, the data shows:

- Increased escalation among disputes involving clinical judgment or patient outcomes
- Greater sensitivity around complaints where trust, confidence or perceived harm were involved, which are more likely to resist early closure

However, there are also counterbalancing indicators of containment:

- Reductions in average resolution times across both mediated and non-mediated cases
- Increased use of soft referrals and early signposting, reducing unnecessary escalation
- Stable mediation outcomes among some high-volume providers, suggesting improved complaint handling maturity in parts of the sector

Overall Assessment

The 2025-26 data indicate that the OCCS is managing a higher-volume, higher-complexity caseload, with mediation increasingly used as a proportionate response to more challenging disputes. While efficiency gains have been achieved, particularly in resolution times, sustained increases in mediation volumes and open cases indicate ongoing pressure on capacity, especially when disputes involve clinical or professionally sensitive matters.

This profile reinforces the importance of:

- Continued investment in early triage and assessment
- Strong collaboration across referral pathways
- Ongoing monitoring of dispute intensity indicators to ensure that mediation resources remain targeted, proportionate and effective

RESOLUTION PERFORMANCE

Overview

During 2025-26, the OCCS maintained a strong focus on timely, proportionate and effective resolution, while responding to a significantly increased caseload. Despite a 31% rise in cases received, the service achieved notable improvements in resolution times, expanded targeted-resolution activity, and sustained effective mediation outcomes.

CASES RECEIVED	YoY INCREASE	MEDIATIONS	RESOLUTION RATE
2201	+31%	450	86%

Resolution Timelines

Overall resolution performance improved when compared with the previous reporting year:

- The average time to resolve all cases reduced from 19.2 days to 15.5 days, representing a 19% improvement. This has been achieved through early triage and redeploying resources within the team to adapt the complaint resolution process for complaints that escalate at an earlier stage.
- Mediation resolution times also shortened across most case categories, reflecting improved triage, earlier decision-making and more efficient progression through the complaints process

For cases progressing to mediation:

- The average time to conclude mediated cases reduced from 70.6 days to 60.7 days, an improvement of approximately 22%
- These gains were achieved despite a substantial increase in both the number and complexity of mediated cases

As highlighted, additional resources and investment will be required to maintain reasonable timelines, effectiveness and satisfaction ratings if the increased activity continues throughout 2026-27.

Resolution Outcomes

The distribution of outcomes demonstrates a balanced and proportionate approach to handling complaints:

- The volume of mediated resolutions also rose, increasing from 296 to 450 complaints. This reflects both higher demand and a greater share of disputes requiring structured intervention, and
- The proportion of cases resolved through advice, signposting, or referral remained stable, indicating efficient filtering and appropriate use of OCCS resources.

Targeted Resolution Performance

Targeted resolution remains a key approach to managing demand, increased volumes and escalation. This has involved:

- Earlier triage and case assessment
    - Clearer referral and signposting pathways
    - More effective engagement with providers at an earlier stage of the mediation process to define the information needed, key issues and focus on swift resolution. Examples include not requesting the full clinical history and records for complaints purely relating to consumer terms and rights.

The increased use of targeted resolution has contributed to improved overall timeliness and reduced unnecessary progression to mediation.

The OCCS continues to monitor unsuccessful mediation cases closely, recognising that such cases often involve higher-intensity disputes, including clinical judgement, trust, or perceived harm, where consensual resolution may be more difficult to achieve.

Service User Feedback

High levels of consumer satisfaction during 2025-26 reflect confidence in OCCS support and resolution.

Feedback response rate is currently 10% of mediations, gathered during 2025-26, which indicates that consumers continue to value the OCCS as a supportive, accessible and independent route to resolving disputes.

Overall sentiment remained strongly positive across the core service measures. In 2025-26, around nine in ten respondents said they would use the OCCS again (90.9%), and similarly high proportions felt the OCCS understood their concerns (90.9%) and was helpful (88.6%). Respondents also reported high levels of satisfaction with ease of contact (84.1%), process satisfaction (79.5%), and outcome satisfaction (79.5%), as well as strong ratings for productivity (81.8%), efficiency (79.5%), and willingness to recommend OCCS to others (86.4%).

Where feedback is less positive, comments most often relate to timeliness and updates, especially where progress depends on delayed practice engagement (including references to long-running cases and requests for clearer timeframes), and in a small number of cases, dissatisfaction with outcomes or clarity of final explanations. These insights align with the OCCS's continued focus on expectation setting, proactive communication, and supporting providers to respond promptly and constructively.

Practice feedback is obtained through a range of channels:

- Feedback surveys
- Regular interactions and annual feedback & insight sessions with multiples and optical stakeholders

"Mediation should always be the first step in resolving a complaint and your service certainly achieved this for me."

"The service and support that I received enabled me to receive a refund that I was sure I was due."

"I found the OCCS to be an extremely useful mediator, especially when I could find nowhere else to help me."

"I felt supported and listened to, and was pleased I received a positive outcome"

OCCS is a supportive, accessible and independent route to resolving disputes.

Qualitative comments help explain what drives these ratings. Many respondents highlight reassurance, professionalism and the value of having someone "listen" and translate the process clearly, often naming individual Resolution Managers and praising their efforts

"very efficient" **"reassuring"** **"helpful and understanding"**

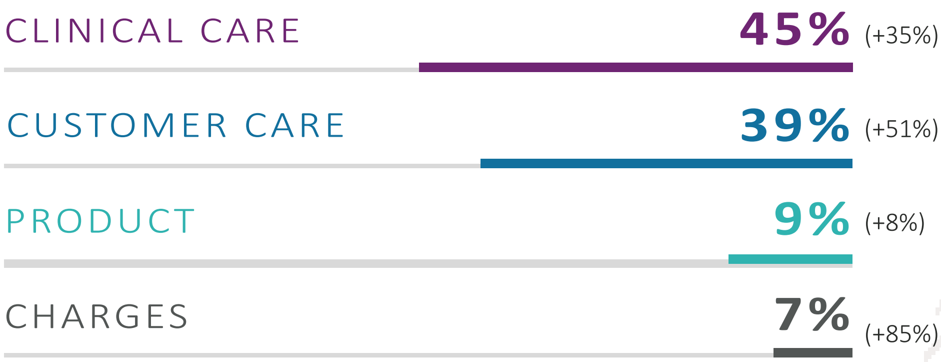
A recurring theme is that the OCCS is sometimes the only route consumers feel they have to make progress, particularly when provider responses are slow.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

The 2025-26 performance data demonstrate that the OCCS has maintained effective resolution outcomes and improved timeliness despite operating in a markedly higher-volume, higher-complexity environment. The combination of faster resolution, stronger early intervention, and sustained mediation effectiveness ensures that resolution processes remain proportionate, fair, and responsive, while highlighting the need for ongoing capacity and demand management.

Complaint Themes and Insights

NATURE OF COMPLAINT



The complaints received by the Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS) during 2025-26 highlight several consistent and emerging themes across clinical care, customer experience, cost and charging practices, and product-related issues. These patterns reflect both the pressures facing consumers in a challenging economic climate and the evolving expectations placed on optical practices.

CLINICAL CARE

45%

Clinical concerns remained the largest category, accounting for approximately 45% of all complaints. These cases are typically related to the examination process, perceived diagnostic issues, the communication of clinical findings, and situations in which no prescription was issued.

Around 23% of all complaints were directly linked to interactions with the optometrist, including concerns about the thoroughness of the examination, clarity of explanations, and the level of care provided.

We also saw continued issues when consumers obtained a prescription from one practice and sought spectacles elsewhere, accounting for 2.5% of all complaints. The OCCS supported resolution in over 90% of these cases.

Myopia management enquiries increased significantly, rising from 4 to 16 cases, with enquiries largely centred on consent, communication, and expectation setting rather than clinical outcomes.

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND AFTERCARE

39%

Customer service and aftercare accounted for approximately 40% of complaints, reflecting the importance of communication, expectation management, and continuity of care throughout the consumer journey.

Common themes included delays in aftercare, dissatisfaction with the dispensing process, and concerns about how issues were handled once raised.

The proportion of complaints concerning customer care and service requiring full OCCS mediation input has increased compared with 2024-25. Some of this change in approach appears to be linked to consumers' ability to research and draft comprehensive complaint letters online. This means consumers contact the OCCS with clearer, more firmly defined expectations of the outcomes they seek, often requiring more active facilitation to resolve them.

PRODUCT-RELATED ISSUES

9%

Product-related complaints decreased slightly from 11% to 9%, reflecting improvements in dispensing accuracy and product quality, as well as more effective local resolution within practices.

Where product issues did arise, they commonly concerned varifocal adaptation, lens performance, frame durability, or expectations regarding product guarantees.

Complaints involving online suppliers increased by 47% (from 36 to 53), with the majority involving UK-registered companies without an associated GOC registrant. These cases often centred on product quality, fulfilment issues, and difficulties accessing aftercare.

COST, CHARGES, AND COMMERCIAL TRANSPARENCY

7%

Complaints relating to costs and charges rose significantly, increasing from 4% to 7% of all cases (from 73 to 158). This trend aligns with wider economic pressures and heightened consumer sensitivity to value, transparency, and perceived fairness. This is consistent with complaint activity in other sectors.

Concerns typically relate to unclear pricing structures, unexpected charges, refund policies, and the perceived value of products or services. The OCCS continues to play a key role in helping consumers understand the basis of charges and supporting practices to communicate more clearly and consistently.

SECTOR-SPECIFIC TRENDS

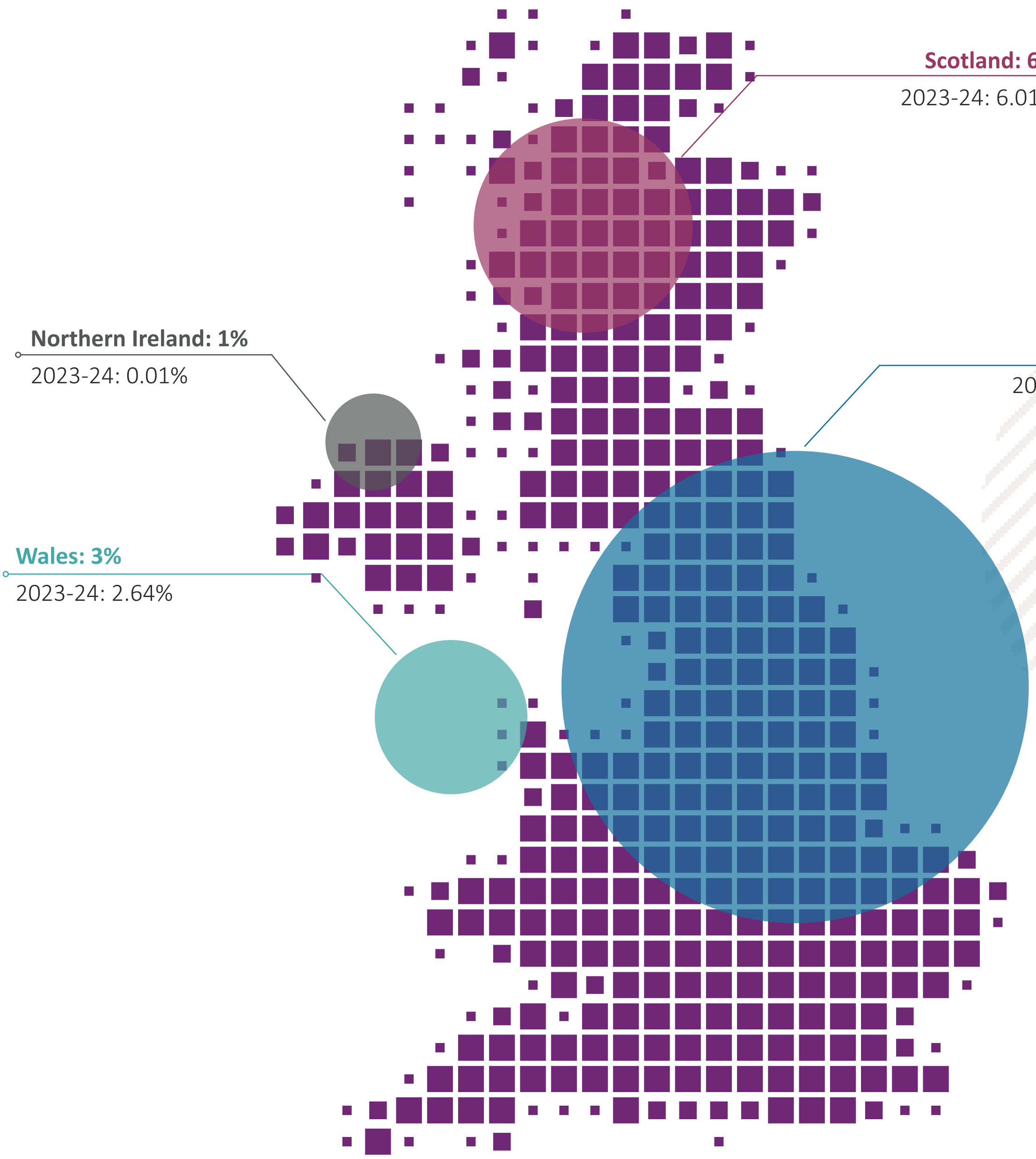
LASER AND CATARACT

Laser and Cataract issues saw a significant increase in concerns relating to both laser eye surgery and optical care associated with cataract diagnosis and treatment, with the doubling year on year. These cases are complex, with around 30% requiring mediation, substantially higher than the sector wide (20%). These complaints are more likely to involve communication explanation and consumer expectations than clinical concerns. Last year, the OCCS saw a 135% increase in complaint relating to laser and cataract. In 2024-5, any one time OCCS had 2.5 cases relating to laser eye surgery being mediated throughout the year, in 2025-26, this increased to 20. This increase is likely to be linked to greater awareness of the OCCS, practices having greater confidence in the OCCS to support complaints of this nature, and increases in procedures and more complex treatment types.

DOMICILIARY

Domiciliary complaints increased from 80 to 93 cases, though they fell proportionally from 4.8% to 4.2% of total complaints, remaining broadly aligned with the sector’s size.

REGIONAL ACTIVITY



REFLECTIONS FROM THE OCCS TEAM

Paul Chapman Hatchett

Clinical Advisor

Having completed my first full year with the OCCS, it is clear that while the volume of complaints has increased, the tone and nature of the concerns raised have remained broadly consistent. What has changed, however, is patients' level of awareness of their ability to seek support through the OCCS. Consumers appear increasingly confident in raising concerns, and practices are more frequently recognising when they have reached the limits of their internal processes and would benefit from independent mediation.

This shift reflects the growing trust and value placed in the OCCS by both optical consumers and providers. The feedback received during CPD sessions reinforces this—registrants consistently express appreciation for the clarity, balance, and support the OCCS brings to complaint resolution.

From an optometric standpoint, a key insight this year has been the ongoing need to remind registrants of the importance of documenting clinical reasoning, clearly recording how advice was communicated, and ensuring that patients have genuinely understood the information provided. Thorough, contemporaneous records not only support registrants should a concern be raised—whether with the OCCS or the GOC—but also enable all members of the practice team to provide patients with consistent information. This continuity is essential for building and maintaining trust throughout the patient journey.

The year has also highlighted the value of broad and inclusive CPD engagement, to help ensure that we reach as wide a cross-section of registrants as possible. We have endeavoured to include locums, early-career practitioners, and those working in diverse practice settings, with the goal of driving improvement of standards across the profession. By sharing insights from complaints and emphasising the roles of communication, expectation setting, and record-keeping, CPD continues to play a central role in preventing complaints and supporting high-quality patient care.

Rachael Brennan

Complaints Resolution Manager

Reflecting on the past year with the OCCS, it is clear that the foundations of effective complaint prevention continue to lie in clear communication, early expectation setting, and transparency throughout the patient journey. Consumer feedback consistently highlights the importance of practices explaining, from the outset, what patients can expect in terms of processes, costs, aftercare, and what to do if something goes wrong. When patients understand how a practice will support them and feel confident they can return with concerns, trust is strengthened, satisfaction improves, and unnecessary escalation is avoided.

A notable development this year has been the increasing use of AI tools by consumers when raising complaints or seeking to understand their rights under consumer law. For many, this has lowered the barrier to expressing concerns, giving voice to individuals who may have previously struggled to articulate their issues. While this can be empowering, it also brings challenges. AI generated content is not always accurate, and it is essential that both consumers and practitioners treat such information as a starting point rather than definitive guidance. Ensuring that advice is verified and grounded in the realities of optical regulation and consumer law remains crucial.

Another continuing theme is the growing emphasis consumers place on value for money. Patients increasingly want to understand not only what they are paying for, but how the products and services they receive reflect that value. Expectations around what constitutes a reasonable offer to resolve a complaint have risen, and practices are under greater pressure to demonstrate fairness, transparency, and responsiveness.

In this context, maintaining high standards of customer care is more important than ever. Consumers expect attentive service, clear explanations, and timely responses when concerns arise. Practices that invest in communication and relationship building are better positioned to maintain trust and resolve issues quickly and constructively.

As complaint volumes continue to rise, these insights reinforce the importance of the OCCS's role in supporting both consumers and practices. By promoting clarity, empathy, and early engagement, we can help ensure that concerns are addressed promptly and that the patient–practice relationship remains strong.

Dawn Slocombe

Complaints Resolution Manager

2025-2026 has proved to be a busier year for the OCCS, with an increase in overall enquiries and in mediations assigned to the Resolution Managers, which has been challenging. Our days are extremely busy.

References to Consumer Law and its relation to bespoke products are becoming more frequent, with consumers often relying on information provided online about the product. These necessitate further discussions with the OCCS, for both consumers and practices given the bespoke nature of products supplied by practices.

It is a pleasure engaging with consumers and practices this year, and I have noticed an increase in practices contacting the OCCS to seek advice on resolving consumer issues before the mediation process. We have received very positive feedback from all sectors.

Kayleigh Turnbull
Complaints Resolution Manager

Over the past year, the OCCS has seen a noticeable increase in the need for direct intervention to support resolution between patients and practices. More consumers are returning to OCCS following initial advice, suggesting a shift away from issues being resolved at a local level. There has also been a rise in concerns relating to myopia management, particularly around informed consent, terms and conditions, and the consistency of communication at the front-of-house stage.

Customer expectations continue to evolve, with greater focus on the quality and longevity of frames and lenses, leading to more disputes around warranties, replacements, and multifocal products. In addition, complaints linked to external prescriptions have increased, often involving perceptions of incorrect outcomes. The growing use of AI-assisted complaint submissions is also influencing interactions, at times complicating communication, obscuring the root cause of issues, and raising unrealistic expectations regarding entitlement and outcomes.

These trends sit alongside wider cultural and economic pressures, including the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, which is placing additional strain on both consumers and providers. As a result, there is an increasing demand for support in complaint handling and resolution across both sides.

Working with the General Optical Council

The relationship between the OCCS and the General Optical Council (GOC) continues to strengthen, with 2025-26 marking a year of more proactive collaboration, earlier signposting, and improved alignment in triage and consumer guidance. This partnership remains central to directing consumers to the most appropriate route for their concern and to supporting the GOC in focusing its regulatory resources on matters relating to Fitness to Practise.

143
GOC Referrals to OCCS

REFERRAL ACTIVITY AND EARLY SIGNPOSTING

During the reporting period, the GOC referred 143 enquiries to the OCCS, a 6% increase from 135 the previous year. Although the GOC's overall enquiry volume rose from 464 to 607, the proportion directed to the OCCS remained significant at 23.6%, representing almost a quarter of all enquiries received by the regulator.

A notable development has been the shift toward earlier signposting. Historically, around two-thirds of referrals were passed to the OCCS during the fortnightly joint review meeting. This year, 55% of referrals were redirected at the earliest stage of GOC triage, enabling consumers to access mediation support more quickly and reducing unnecessary progression through regulatory pathways. This change reflects the GOC's growing confidence in the OCCS's ability to resolve consumer service issues efficiently and constructively.

IMPROVING CONSUMER UNDERSTANDING AND EXPECTATIONS

The OCCS has worked closely with the GOC triage team to ensure that consumers receive clear, consistent explanations of the respective roles of the OCCS and the regulator. This has been particularly important in cases where consumers initially approach the GOC with service-related concerns rather than regulatory ones.

Joint efforts have focused on:

- Clarifying the distinction between Fitness to Practise issues and consumer service concerns
- Ensuring consumers understand the scope and limitations of mediation
- Aligning messaging to prevent unrealistic expectations about compensation or regulatory outcomes

This collaborative approach has contributed to smoother consumer journeys and reduced frustration for individuals who may otherwise have been directed through inappropriate channels.

SUPPORTING THE GOC THROUGH INSIGHT AND FEEDBACK

Beyond case referrals, the OCCS continues to provide the GOC with valuable insights into emerging trends, consumer expectations, and areas where communication or practice behaviours may contribute to complaints. This includes:

- Feedback on recurring themes such as cost transparency, aftercare, and communication
- Early identification of issues arising from online providers without GOC registrants
- Insight into sector specific challenges, including the rise in concerns relating to laser and lens extraction providers
- An insight-based session for GOC Triage & Investigation teams around the increasing scope of Optometric practice and insights we are seeing at the OCCS, particularly around clear communication of expectations and ensuring valid consent for treatments, which are predominately fee paying.

These insights support the GOC's strategic focus on prevention, and wider regulatory functions, including wider regulatory functions, including policy development, standards review, and stakeholder engagement.

Engagement and Upstreaming

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD) – EXPANDING REACH AND ENGAGEMENT

During the year, the Optical Consumer Complaints Service delivered a significant programme of CPD activity across the optical sector, reaching a large and diverse audience through both OCCS-led and partner-hosted events. In total, OCCS delivered 45 CPD sessions across a wide range of settings, including national conferences, Local Optical Committee (LOC) events and national webinars. A key priority throughout the year was to ensure that CPD activity reached as broad a cohort of registrants as possible.

45 CPD SESSIONS

In addition to issuing over 1,100 CPD certificates directly, it is estimated that a further 700 or more certificates were issued by event partners for OCCS CPD sessions. Targeted sessions were delivered for locum optometrists and dispensing opticians, recognising the particular challenges they face when working across different practice environments with varying systems, cultures and communication approaches.

As part of the 2025-26 CPD programme, OCCS introduced structured participant feedback, asking attendees to rate the usefulness of each session and to suggest future topics. Despite feedback being optional, response rates to date have been exceptionally high at 93%, with strong, consistently positive results from both optometrists and dispensing opticians, reflecting the content's sector-wide relevance. CPD themes increasingly focused on complaint prevention and targeted resolution, emphasising practice-wide responsibility for complaint handling, proactive communication, and the role of all staff, particularly front-of-house teams, in creating a positive patient experience.

93% POSITIVE FEEDBACK

STRENGTHENING OPERATIONAL COLLABORATION

Regular engagement between OCCS and GOC teams, including triage, investigations, policy, and new Council members, has helped ensure a consistent understanding of the OCCS's role and the value of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) within the optical sector.

Training and briefing sessions delivered by the OCCS have supported GOC staff in:

- Recognising case studies for mediation
- Ensuring regulatory resources are focused
- Understanding consumer behaviour and expectations
- Improving the accuracy of signposting

This operational alignment has contributed to more efficient case handling and improved outcomes for consumers and registrants.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT – CONSUMERS

Consumer Access to the OCCS

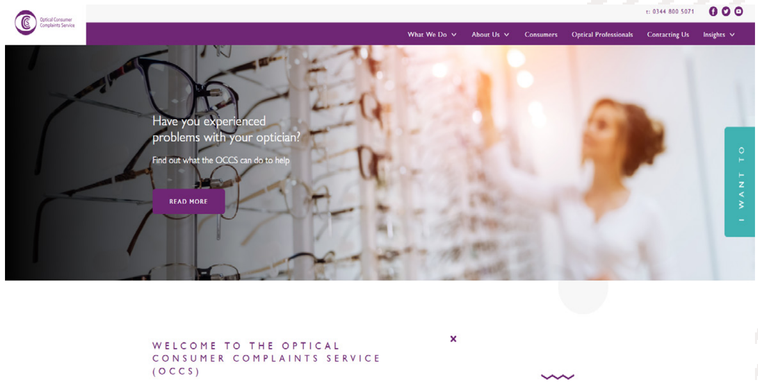
The OCCS is committed to ensuring that its arrangements for consumer access are clear, proportionate, and inclusive and consistent with principles of good administration. Access routes are designed to support transparency, fairness, and public confidence, while recognising the varied circumstances in which consumers may seek to engage with the OCCS.

ACCESS CHANNELS

Consumers can access the OCCS through a combination of digital and non-digital channels, enabling them to engage with the service in ways that best meet their needs.

DIGITAL SERVICES

The OCCS website serves as the primary public interface and provides authoritative information on OCCS's role, remit, and processes. Digital access arrangements support:



- Clarity about the circumstances in which the OCCS can consider a complaint or concern
- Online submission of enquiries and complaints to enable timely and consistent handling
- Information to assist consumers in understanding complaint handling expectations and outcomes

Digital services are designed to support consistency, transparency and efficiency, while ensuring that content is presented in accessible, plain language.

TELEPHONE AND DIRECT CONTACT

The OCCS recognises that digital access may not be appropriate or sufficient for all consumers. Telephone support is therefore available to ensure equitable access and to provide additional assistance where required.

Telephone contact enables consumers to:

- Seek clarification on the OCCS's role and remit
- Receive guidance on complaint procedures and next steps

Staff handling telephone enquiries act in accordance with principles of fairness, courtesy and clarity, taking account of individual circumstances and any indicators of vulnerability.

ACCESSIBILITY AND REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

The OCCS is committed to meeting its obligations in relation to equality, accessibility and non-discrimination. Access arrangements are designed to minimise barriers to engagement and to support consumers with diverse needs.

This includes:

- Use of clear and proportionate language in communications
- Offering multiple access routes to avoid digital exclusion
- Making reasonable adjustments where requested, consistent with relevant equality legislation and guidance

The OCCS reviews accessibility considerations to ensure that arrangements remain appropriate and responsive.

REFERRAL AND SIGNPOSTING ARRANGEMENTS

The OCCS receives enquiries at varying stages of the complaints process, including matters that fall outside its remit.

Enquiry received

Out of remit

OCCS explains clearly and transparently the limits of its role

OCCS signposts or refer consumers to the appropriate regulator, complaints body or ombudsman

OCCS provides information to support effective onward engagement

These referral pathways contribute to a coherent and proportionate complaints landscape, supporting consumer confidence.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - OPTICAL SECTOR AND PROFESSIONALS

Effective stakeholder engagement remains central to the OCCS's role as an independent, trusted service supporting both consumers and the optical sector. Over the past year, the OCCS has continued to strengthen relationships across the profession, ensuring that insights from complaints, consumer behaviour trends, and learning from mediation are shared widely and constructively.

STRENGTHENING SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

The OCCS has maintained strong and collaborative relationships with key sector bodies, including LOCSU, AOP, FODO, ABDO, and other professional organisations. Regular dialogue with these partners has supported shared understanding of emerging issues, helped align messaging on consumer expectations, and ensured that learning from OCCS casework is reflected in sector guidance and professional development.

Engagement with Local Optical Committees (LOCs) across England has continued to grow, with OCCS participation in regional events, CPD sessions, and discussions on complaint handling culture. These interactions have helped reinforce the importance of targeted resolution, clear communication, and consistent patient support across diverse practice settings.

COLLABORATION WITH SECTOR MEDIA

The OCCS has also maintained a strong presence in optical media, working closely with leading publications and digital platforms to share insights, highlight trends, and promote best practices. Media engagement has played an important role in raising awareness of the OCCS's work, supporting registrants' understanding of common complaint themes, and encouraging practices to adopt proactive approaches to communication and aftercare.

Through articles, interviews, and commentary, the OCCS has contributed to sector wide conversations on topics such as cost transparency, myopia management, and the impact of economic pressures on consumer expectations.

ENGAGEMENT WITH PROVIDERS ACROSS THE SECTOR

The OCCS continues to work closely with multiple independent practices, domiciliary providers, and laser providers, ensuring that all parts of the sector have access to support, insights, and mediation expertise. This year saw increased engagement with senior leadership teams within specialist providers, reflecting the rise in complex cases requiring mediation and the shared commitment to improving communication and patient experience.

Regular contact with practice teams, both clinical and non clinical, has helped reinforce the value of early engagement with the OCCS and the benefits of constructive, open dialogue when concerns arise.

BUILDING A SHARED CULTURE OF LEARNING

Across all stakeholder groups, the OCCS has continued to champion a culture of openness, learning, and continuous improvement. By sharing data, insights, and case trends, the OCCS helps stakeholders identify areas for development, strengthen communication practices, and improve the overall consumer journey.

This collaborative approach ensures that the OCCS remains not only a mediation service but a partner in raising standards, supporting registrants, and promoting trust between patients and the optical sector.

USING COMPLAINT INSIGHTS TO DRIVE LEARNING

The core focus of OCCS CPD continued to be the translation of real-world complaint insights into practical learning for registrants. Sessions explored:

- How clear, consistent communication with patients and colleagues can prevent misunderstandings
- The importance of setting and checking expectations throughout the patient journey
- Strategies for managing difficult conversations and resolving concerns early
- The role of transparent explanations in reducing perceived clinical or service failings

Record keeping remained a prominent theme. CPD emphasised the importance of clear, comprehensive, and contemporaneous records, both to protect registrants and to support continuity of care. Good documentation was highlighted as a key factor in reducing disputes and improving patient experience.

SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION OF REGISTRANTS

To strengthen upstream education, the OCCS has developed a webinar for undergraduate students, scheduled for release at the start of the 2026-27 academic year. This resource introduces students to the OCCS, the principles of mediation, and the importance of communication in preventing complaints. It also includes common scenarios encountered in practice, with guidance on:

- Recognising when concerns require escalation
- Understanding the limits of one's competence
- Navigating challenging interactions with confidence and professionalism

This initiative aims to embed good communication habits early in a registrant's career, supporting long term improvements in complaint prevention.

DEVELOPING RESOURCES FOR FRONT OF HOUSE TEAMS

Recognising the pivotal role of non clinical staff in shaping the patient experience, the OCCS is also developing new educational content for front of house teams. These resources will focus on:

- Identifying early signs that a patient has concerns
- Responding empathetically and constructively
- Using proactive communication to prevent escalation
- Understanding when and how to involve clinical colleagues

Front-of-house staff are often the first point of contact when issues arise, and equipping them with the confidence and skills to manage concerns effectively can significantly reduce the likelihood of formal complaints.

Looking Ahead: Priorities and Planned Developments

As the OCCS moves into 2026-27, our focus remains on strengthening the quality, accessibility, and impact of the service while supporting the wider optical sector to prevent complaints and enhance the consumer experience. Building on the insights and trends observed over the past year, several key priorities will shape our work in the year ahead.

1	Enhancing Accessbility and Customer Support
2	Deepening Collaboration with the GOC
3	Strengthening CPD and Upstream Education
4	Improving Insight Sharing and Sector Learning
5	Investing in Service Infrastructure and Efficiency

ENHANCING ACCESSIBILITY AND CONSUMER SUPPORT

We will continue to improve the accessibility of the OCCS for all consumers, with particular emphasis on supporting individuals with additional needs, including neurodiverse patients and those requiring tailored communication approaches. Planned developments include:

- Refining online pathways to make it easier for consumers to understand how the OCCS can help
- Reviewing our communication materials to ensure they are inclusive, clear, and accessible
- Strengthening guidance for practices on supporting vulnerable patients and carers

These improvements aim to ensure that every consumer can access fair, timely, and appropriate support.

DEEPENING COLLABORATION WITH THE GOC

Our partnership with the GOC will remain central to improving the consumer journey. Building on the success of earlier signposting and closer triage alignment, we will:

- Continue joint work to clarify the boundaries between regulatory and consumer service issues
- Share insights to support policy development and standards review
- Expand and enhance training and briefing sessions with GOC teams with a focus on providing a greater insight into the function and decision-making processes of the GOC triage team, while also ensuring a consistent and shared understanding of the role of the OCCS.
- This collaboration will help ensure that consumers are directed to the right place at the right time, reducing unnecessary escalation and improving outcomes.

STRENGTHENING CPD AND UPSTREAM EDUCATION

CPD and early career education will continue to be a major focus for the OCCS. Priorities for the coming year include:

- Launching the new student webinar at the start of the 2026–27 academic year
- Expanding CPD delivery to reach more registrants, including locums and those in independent practice
- Developing additional content on communication, expectation setting, and record keeping
- Creating new resources for front of house teams, recognising their vital role in early complaint prevention

By supporting registrants at all stages of their careers, we aim to embed strong communication practices and reduce avoidable complaints across the sector.

IMPROVING INSIGHT SHARING AND SECTOR LEARNING

The OCCS will continue to use complaint data to identify emerging trends and share learning with the sector. Planned developments include:

- Producing more regular thematic insights for practices and professional bodies
- Supporting sector wide discussions on issues such as cost transparency, and myopia management
- Working with providers of laser and lens extraction services to improve communication and reduce the complexity of mediated cases

These insights will help practices anticipate challenges and strengthen their approach to patient care.

INVESTING IN SERVICE INFRASTRUCTURE AND EFFICIENCY

With complaint volumes continuing to rise, the OCCS will focus on maintaining high quality, timely mediation. Key developments include:

- Further embedding the new IT system to improve case management and reporting
- Refining internal processes to support faster resolution times
- Ensuring staffing levels remain aligned with demand and case complexity

These improvements will help us maintain the high standards expected by consumers, practices, and the GOC.

SUPPORTING A POSITIVE COMPLAINT HANDLING CULTURE

Finally, the OCCS will continue to champion a culture of openness, early resolution, and constructive communication across the optical sector. We will:

- Encourage practices to view complaints as opportunities for learning
- Promote proactive engagement with consumers at the earliest stage
- Support teams in developing confidence and consistency in handling concerns

By strengthening the complaint-handling culture, we aim to reduce escalation, improve patient trust, and support the sector's long-term resilience.

Acknowledgements and Closing Remarks

As we conclude this year's Annual Report, the OCCS would like to extend sincere thanks to the many individuals and organisations who have contributed to another year of constructive, collaborative, and impactful work on behalf of optical consumers.

Our continued progress is only possible through the strong partnerships we maintain across the sector. We are grateful to the General Optical Council (GOC) for their ongoing engagement, early signposting, and shared commitment to ensuring that consumers are directed to the most appropriate route for their concerns. The strengthened relationship between our teams has played a vital role in improving the consumer journey and ensuring that regulatory and mediation pathways remain clear and effective.

We also thank the professional bodies, including the AOP, FODO, ABDO, and LOCs across the UK, for their willingness to share insight, participate in CPD activity, and support the wider culture of openness and learning that underpins effective complaint resolution. Their collaboration helps ensure that the lessons emerging from OCCS casework translate into meaningful improvements in practice.

Our appreciation extends to the optical practices, multiples, independents, and domiciliary providers who have engaged with the OCCS throughout the year. Their willingness to work constructively with us, often in challenging circumstances, demonstrates a shared commitment to maintaining trust, transparency, and high standards of care for patients. The growing number of practices proactively directing consumers to the OCCS reflects confidence in our service and the value of independent mediation.

We also acknowledge the contributions of registrants and front-of-house teams who have participated in CPD sessions, shared feedback, and embraced opportunities to strengthen communication and complaint-handling skills. Their engagement is essential to upstream work that helps prevent complaints and supports a more positive patient experience.

As the OCCS looks ahead, we remain committed to evolving in step with the sector, strengthening our role as a trusted, independent resource, and ensuring that every consumer has access to fair, timely, and constructive support. The insights gained this year will continue to shape our priorities, inform our educational work, and guide our contribution to improving the optical landscape for both patients and practitioners.

The OCCS thanks all who have supported, engaged with, and contributed to our work over the past year. We look forward to continuing this shared journey of learning, improvement, and collaboration.

Appendix 1: Outcomes

Outcomes (All)

	2025-26	2024-25	+/-
Out of Remit	119	86	28%
Supporting Local Resolution	1308	1023	22%
Referred To Practice	728	550	24%
Advice Only	580	473	18%
Consumer Not to Pursue	107	167	-56%
Resolved on Mediation	387	241	38%
Mediation Unsuccessful	73	49	33%
Practice Advice	92	91	1%
Concluded	2086	1657	21%

Appendix 2: Complaint Nature

Nature of Complaint

	2025-26	2024-25	+/-
Clinical Care	980	813	21%
Customer Care	874	608	44%
Product	189	185	2%
Charges	158	73	116%

Appendix 3: Business Types

Business Types

	% of OCCS Enquiries
Independent	22%
Franchise/JVP	31%
Multi-Site Corporation	45%
Other	2%

Business Types - Nature of Received Complaint

	Independent	Franchise/JVP	Multi-Site Corporation
Clinical Care	41%	50%	45%
Customer Care	48%	35%	35%
Product	6%	10%	9%
Charges	6%	5%	10%

Business Types - Outcome

	Independent	Franchise/JVP	Multi-Site Corporation
Practice Advice	10%	4%	2%
Out Of Remit	10%	3%	2%
Supporting local resolution	55%	58%	60%
Consumer not pursue	5%	7%	6%
Resolved on mediation	15%	24%	26%
Mediation concluded without a resolution	4%	4%	4%

Appendix 4: EDI Data

Age Range

	OCCS 2025-26	OCCS 2024-25	Comparison with National Data
16-24	4%	4%	11.7%
25-34	10%	11%	13.5%
35-44	15%	11%	13%
45-55	24%	22%	13.3%
55-64	23%	23%	12.6%
65 or over	23%	28%	18.5%
Under 16	0%	1%	20.8%

Gender

	OCCS 2025-26	OCCS 2024-25	Comparison with National Data
Female	50%	61%	50.4%
Male	48%	37%	49.2%
Other	2%	1%	0.4%

Disability

	OCCS 2025-26	OCCS 2024-25	Comparison with National Data
No	71%	76%	82.2%
Yes	29%	24%	17.8%

Ethnicity

	OCCS 2025-26	OCCS 2024-25	Comparison with National Data
Asian	10%	9%	9.3%
Black	7%	3%	4.0%
Mixed	2%	3%	2.9%
Other	4%	5%	2.1%
White	77%	81%	81.7%

Sexual Orientation

	OCCS 2025-26	OCCS 2024-25	Comparison with National Data
Bisexual	2%	1%	2%
Gay	2%	3%	2.7%
Heterosexual	91%	90%	93.6%
Other	5%	6%	1.7%
Prefer not to say	0%	0%	Not a category in ONS Census

Marital Status

	OCCS 2025-26	OCCS 2024-25	Comparison with National Data
Married	48%	46%	40.7%
Single	29%	32%	47.5%
Divorced	8%	6%	6.6%
Widowed	5%	7%	0.1%
Civil Partnership	3%	3%	4.9%
Separated	1%	1%	Not a category in the ONS Census
Prefer not to say	7%	5%	Not a category in the ONS Census

Religion

	OCCS 2025-26	OCCS 2024-25	Comparison with National Data
Buddhist	1%	2%	0.5%
Christian	44%	48%	46.2%
Hindu	3%	2%	1.7%
Muslim	6%	6%	6.5%
None	30%	24%	37.2%
Other	3%	4%	0.6%
Prefer not to Say	10%	12%	6.0%
Sikh	1%	1%	0.9%
Jewish	1%	1%	0.5%

Region

	OCCS 2025-26	OCCS 2024-25	Comparison with National Data
Wales	3%	4%	5%
Scotland	7%	7%	8%
England	89%	88%	84%
Northern Ireland	1%	1%	3%

Appendix 5: Feedback

	Service User Feedback
Client would use OCCS again	
Strongly agree/agree	91%
Strongly disagree	9%
The client would use ADR again	
Strongly agree/agree	86%
Strongly disagree	14%
Client is satisfied with the outcome	
Strongly agree/agree	80%
Strongly disagree	20%
The client is satisfied with the process	
Strongly agree/agree	83%
Strongly disagree	19%
Easy to contact OCCS	
Strongly agree/agree	86%
Strongly disagree	14%
The OCCS understood my concerns	
Strongly agree/agree	93%
Strongly disagree	7%
The OCCS were fair	
Strongly agree/agree	79%
Strongly disagree	21%
The OCCS were productive	
Strongly agree/agree	86%
Strongly disagree	14%
The OCCS were efficient	
Strongly agree/agree	83%
Strongly disagree	17%

The OCCS were helpful	
Strongly agree/agree	91%
Strongly disagree	9%
The client would recommend OCCS to others	
Strongly agree/agree	90%
Strongly disagree	10%