



Optical Consumer Complaints Service Scheme Rules

UPDATED AUGUST 2026

ABOUT THE OCCS

The Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS) is accredited by CTSI under delegated powers from the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, under the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024. (TO BE CONFIRMED POST ASSESSMENT)

The Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS) provides Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) for complaints brought by a consumer against an optical business, optical practice, or optical professional where the complaint falls within the remit of the service.

To find out more about the OCCS process and remit, please visit;
<https://www.opticalcomplaints.co.uk/our-process/>.

The OCCS is a mediation-based service. Its process is voluntary and resolution focused. OCCS does not impose a decision on the consumer or the optical practice. Where a resolution is agreed, the outcome will be confirmed in writing and, where appropriate, recorded in a mediation agreement signed by both parties.

The OCCS annual report can be viewed here: <https://www.opticalcomplaints.co.uk/insights/downloads/>

MATTER	OCCS INFORMATION
Method	Mediation and mediation-based complaint resolution; no imposed decision.
Language	Mediation in English; initial complaint details can currently be received in several listed languages.
Consumer fee	Free to consumers.
Precondition	Consumer should normally exhaust the optical practice/business complaint process first.
Referral time limit	Normally within 12 months of the practice/business final response.
Withdrawal	Consumer may withdraw at any time.
Costs	OCCS can mediate financial resolutions. It does not however award legal costs, damages or compensation.

Proposed solution	Resolution requires party agreement as the OCCS is a mediation based service.
Court action	Participation in OCCS ADR does not prevent legal proceedings.
Complete case file	Both parties are notified in writing when the OCCS has the information needed for the ADR process to begin.
Average duration	45 days

SCOPE OF THE ADR PROCESS

The OCCS uses mediation and mediation-based complaint resolution techniques to resolve complaints.

We offer ADR for consumer complaints relating to optical goods and services, customer care, clinical care, product-related issues, charges, aftercare, complaint handling, and communication between consumers and optical practices or businesses. The OCCS can usually consider complaints where the complaint concerns an optical practice, business, or optical professional within the scope of the General Optical Council's regulatory framework.

Participation in the OCCS ADR process may result in the following possible outcomes:

- advice or guidance to support local resolution;
- referral back to the optical practice where the practice's own complaint process has not been exhausted;
- signposting to another appropriate organisation where the complaint is outside the OCCS remit;
- resolution at an early stage following OCCS intervention;
- a mediated agreement between the consumer and optical practice;
- a proposed resolution for the parties to consider;
- conclusion of the mediation without agreement; or
- referral to the General Optical Council where the concern raises potential fitness to practise or regulatory issues.

The OCCS is competent to deal with consumer optical complaints where the concern relates to the provision of optical goods or services, including the consumer experience of eye examinations, dispensing, spectacles, contact lenses, aftercare, customer communication, complaint handling, pricing transparency, and the practical resolution of disputes between consumers and optical businesses.

The OCCS does not determine clinical negligence claims, make findings of fact, impose sanctions, award damages, or act as a regulator. Where a complaint raises serious clinical, conduct, safeguarding, or fitness to practise concerns, the OCCS may signpost or refer the matter to the General Optical Council or another appropriate body.

CONTACT DETAILS

- Optical Consumer Complaints Service, 6 Market Square, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, CM23 3UZ.
- Telephone: 0344 800 5071
- Email: enquiries@opticalcomplaints.co.uk

- Online complaint form: <https://submit.opticalcomplaints.co.uk/SubmitComplaint/>
- Website: <https://www.opticalcomplaints.co.uk/>

The ADR procedure is a telephone based mediation process. Information can be provided by online submission, email, post, telephone discussion, or secure electronic document sharing where appropriate.

LANGUAGE INFORMATION

The OCCS is currently able to receive complaint details in the following languages:

- Cantonese
- Greek
- Italian
- Portuguese
- Spanish
- Welsh

At the present time, the OCCS are unable to conduct mediation in languages other than English, but will provide help in finding translation assistance.

WHAT THE OCCS TAKES INTO ACCOUNT

We will take into account the relevant consumer complaint circumstances, the information and evidence provided by both parties, relevant professional and regulatory standards, consumer rights considerations, the General Optical Council's standards, and the principles of fairness, proportionality, independence, and impartiality when resolving complaints.

CONSUMER CHOICE AND LEGAL RIGHTS

- The complainant can withdraw their complaint from this ADR procedure at any time.
- The OCCS is a mediation-based service. Outcomes are not imposed by the OCCS. A resolution will only become binding where the parties agree the outcome and, where appropriate, record that agreement in writing.
- Participation in the OCCS procedure does not prevent a consumer seeking redress through the courts.
- The process is accessible and informal so both parties generally participate in the mediation process. The parties are entitled to be represented or assisted by another person during the process, but would not require legal representation.
- The average length of the OCCS process is currently approximately 15.5 days for all cases. For cases progressing to mediation, the average time to conclude mediated cases is approximately 60.7 days.
- The OCCS does not award costs, damages, or compensation. Where a resolution is agreed, it may include practical steps such as further communication, remedial action, refund, replacement, apology, explanation, review, or another outcome agreed between the parties.

REFERRING A COMPLAINT TO THE OPTICAL CONSUMER COMPLAINTS SERVICE (OCCS)

- Optical practices and businesses should inform customers that they have access to a free ADR service through the OCCS when they have reached the end of the practice's own internal complaints process. This is required under General Optical Council's Standards of Practice for

Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians (Practice Standard 18). Details on how to contact the OCCS should be provided to customers by the practice or business.

- The complainant must usually have exhausted the optical practice or business's own complaints process before a complaint can be raised with the OCCS.
- Complainants have 12 months from the date of the optical practice or business's final response to raise a complaint with the OCCS.
- Only complaints within the OCCS remit can use this service. The OCCS will consider whether the complaint relates to an optical practice, business, or professional within the relevant scope of the service.
- Complaints can be submitted using the contact details outlined above, or by submitting through the online portal here: <https://submit.opticalcomplaints.co.uk/SubmitComplaint/>
- When making a complaint, consumers should provide their contact details, details of the optical practice or business, a summary of the complaint, the outcome they are seeking, copies of relevant correspondence, and any relevant documents or records.

WHEN THE OCCS MAY REFUSE TO MEDIATE A COMPLAINT

The Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS) may refuse to handle your complaint due to one or more of the following reasons:

- a. Prior to submitting the complaint to the OCCS, the complainant has not attempted to contact the optical practice or business concerned to discuss the complaint and sought, as a first step, to resolve the matter directly with that practice or business.
- b. The dispute is being, or has been previously, considered by another ADR entity, regulator, court, tribunal, or other appropriate body.
- c. The complaint falls outside the scope or remit of the OCCS, including where no relevant optical practice, business, or General Optical Council registrant can be identified.
- d. The complainant has not submitted the complaint within the time frames mentioned above (12 months of the concern arising or within 12 months of the final complaint response from the optical business).
- e. Dealing with such a type of dispute would seriously impair the effective operation of the OCCS.
- f. The complaint raises issues which are more appropriately considered by another body, including the General Optical Council, another regulator, an ombudsman, a court, or a clinical negligence route. If the complaint involves allegations that the optical professional or business is not fit to practise, then the GOC will investigate those aspects. An OCCS complaint process can run alongside the GOC investigation.
- g. The complaint concerns matters that the OCCS is not able to determine, including clinical negligence, findings of professional misconduct, sanctions, or legal liability.

The OCCS may also conclude or pause a mediation where continuing would no longer be appropriate, productive or beneficial, or where the complaint no longer falls within the service's remit. The OCCS will communicate its position to the parties.

REPRESENTATION AND ASSISTANCE

A party may be represented or assisted during the ADR procedure by another person, whether or not that person is legally qualified. The OCCS process is designed to be accessible and informal, and legal representation is not required.

ADR PROCEDURE

- Once the OCCS has received the complaint from the complainant, we will review the details to confirm the complaint falls within the remit of the OCCS. If it is not possible for us to handle your complaint, we will let you know as soon as possible and, where possible, you will be signposted to other organisation(s) who may be able to help.
- If the complaint can be handled, the OCCS will acknowledge this and ask the complainant to review and sign the Agreement to Mediate. Once received, the OCCS will contact the Optical Business and collate the information regarding the complaint.
- Both parties are provided with details on the ADR procedure, including expected timeframes.
- If there is a conflict of interest, the OCCS conflict of interest policy will be followed.
- All relevant information will be collated by the OCCS from both parties, who will have a reasonable amount of time to express their points of view.
- The information required can be submitted either online, by email, through secure electronic sharing, by telephone where appropriate, or by post and may include, but is not limited to:
 - the complainant's name and contact details;
 - date of birth where required for identification;
 - details of the optical practice or business complained about;
 - the nature and circumstances of the complaint;
 - details of any product or service involved;
 - copies of correspondence with the practice or business;
 - copies of receipts, invoices, prescriptions, records, or other relevant documentation;
 - details of the outcome the complainant is seeking;
 - information about what steps have already been taken to resolve the matter;
 - details of any reasonable adjustments needed; and
 - any other information reasonably required to understand and progress the complaint.
- Once all required information is received from the complainant, this will be provided to the optical practice or business for comment. The practice or business will have 10 working days to respond. If optical records are required, the time period will be extended in accordance with the ICO guidelines and GDPR time frames.
- Once the OCCS has all the required information for the ADR process to begin, this will be considered the complete case file and both parties will be notified in writing at this point.
- The OCCS uses mediation to help the parties agree a resolution to the complaint. The resolution manager will use mediation and resolution techniques during interactions with each party.
- Once the OCCS is in receipt of the complete case file, the OCCS aims to conclude the mediation within 45 days of the Agreement to Mediate being returned by the complainant.
- The OCCS will keep parties to the dispute informed about the conduct and progress of any ADR being carried out through telephone contact, email contact, and other agreed communication methods. Communication methods will take account of reasonable adjustments where appropriate.
- The complainant can withdraw their complaint from this ADR procedure at any time.
- The Resolution Manager will facilitate the mediation process in a manner appropriate to the nature and circumstances of the complaint. The Resolution Manager is impartial and independent and will not make findings of fact, determine outcomes, or pass judgement on

either party.

- The parties will be encouraged to consider the issues raised, reflect on their impact, and explore possible options for resolution. The Resolution Manager may suggest possible options for resolution but will not provide legal advice, advocate for either party, or impose a decision.
- The Resolution Manager may end the mediation at any stage if they consider that it is no longer appropriate, productive, or beneficial to continue.
- If a resolution is agreed, this will be confirmed in writing and, where appropriate, recorded in a mediation agreement signed by both parties.
- If a resolution is not agreed, the OCCS may provide a proposed resolution for the parties to consider. The complainant and optical business can accept or reject the proposed resolution.
- The Resolution Manager or either party may request that the mediation be reviewed by a Senior Resolution Manager to consider whether further mediation may be beneficial.
- Once the ADR procedure has concluded and a decision or proposed outcome has been reached, both parties will be provided with this in writing.
- As the parties agree a resolution, rather than an outcome being determined by the OCCS and imposed, there is no formal appeal process against an OCCS mediated outcome. Where appropriate, the matter may be reviewed by a Senior Resolution Manager to consider whether further mediation is appropriate. If a complaint remains unresolved, the consumer may seek advice from another appropriate organisation or pursue any other available route.

TIMELINES

The OCCS aims to work with the practice and consumer to reach a solution promptly. There is a target of 45 days from the Agreement to Mediate being returned by the consumer.

The OCCS reports on the current average timelines within the annual report.

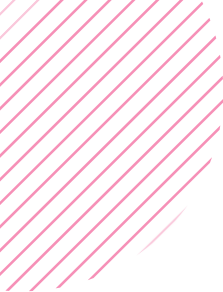
The OCCS notes the maximum of 90 days from receipt of the complete case file for ADR processes (subject to any lawful extension for a highly complex dispute and notification to the parties). The OCCS keeps the parties informed if a case requires additional time.

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

Depending on the circumstances, OCCS involvement may result in:

- advice or guidance to support local resolution;
- referral back to the optical practice where its own complaints process has not been exhausted;
- signposting to another appropriate organisation where the complaint falls outside the OCCS remit;
- early resolution following OCCS intervention;
- a mediated agreement between the consumer and optical practice;
- conclusion of the mediation without agreement; or
- referral or signposting to the GOC where the concern raises potential regulatory or fitness to practise issues

As the OCCS uses mediation techniques to resolve complaints, the terms of the agreed resolutions are varied and directly linked to the needs of the parties involved. They are not limited to financial resolutions, and will often include:

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- Apologies
 - Acknowledgements
 - Explanations
 - Further treatment, goods or services (further examination, products etc)
 - Protocol changes within the business
 - Training and development within the optical business
 - Any other agreed resolution.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The OCCS has a conflict of interest policy and procedure to support independence and impartiality in the handling of complaints. ADR officials are required to disclose, without undue delay, any circumstances that may, or may be seen to, affect their independence or impartiality or give rise to a conflict of interest with any party to the dispute.

The obligation to disclose a potential or actual conflict is a continuing obligation throughout the dispute resolution procedure. Where a conflict of interest is identified, the matter will be reviewed and appropriate steps taken, which may include reallocating the complaint to another Resolution Manager or taking other steps necessary to protect the fairness and integrity of the process.

All ADR officials are employed or engaged by Nockolds and are remunerated by salary, consultancy arrangement, day rate, or mediation rate. Remuneration is not linked to the outcome of any dispute resolution procedure. No ADR official is paid directly by the optical practice, business, or trader involved in a complaint.

The OCCS maintains appropriate conflict of interest records and reviews declarations of interest at appropriate intervals.



REGULATORY FRAMEWORK AND STATUS

These Scheme Rules have been drafted for the OCCS within the consumer ADR framework established by Part 4, Chapter 4 of the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 and the accreditation criteria in Schedule 26, together with the 2026 implementing regulations.

CHANGES TO THESE SCHEME RULES

The OCCS may update these Scheme Rules to reflect changes in law, accreditation requirements, regulatory standards, service scope or operating practice. The version and date should be shown on the published document. Any material change affecting a live complaint should be communicated where relevant to the parties.