

New Standards for Optical Businesses – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What are the Standards for Optical Businesses?

The *Standards for Optical Businesses* define the standards that the GOC expects of optical businesses to protect the public and promote high standards of care. The GOC's role as the UK regulator for the optical professions gives us statutory responsibility for setting standards for optometrists and dispensing opticians, and for optical businesses. Our over-arching statutory objective is the protection of the public and in pursuing this objective we are required to promote and maintain proper standards of conduct for optical business registrants.

2. Why is the GOC replacing the current Code of Conduct for Businesses with the new Standards for Optical Businesses?

The new Standards for Optical Businesses make clearer GOC's expectations of business registrants and are necessary to reflect changes in optical practice including the use of new technology, expanding scopes of practice and the increasing prevalence of multidisciplinary working. The new Standards are also aligned with the *Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians*, which means that they reflect changing public expectations, such as the duty of candour and the need to obtain valid consent from patients.

3. Is the Code of Conduct for business registrants still valid?

No, from 1 October 2019 the Code will be replaced by the Standards for Optical Businesses. The Code will only be used to consider Fitness to Practise cases that occurred before 1 October 2019 (see Q 13 for additional information).

4. When do the new Standards for Optical Businesses come into effect?

The new *Standards for Optical Businesses* come into effect on 1 October 2019, following their initial publication in April.

5. Do all optical businesses have to register with the GOC and follow the new standards?

Corporate bodies operating as optical businesses which use protected titles such as optometrist or optician, must register with the GOC by law. However, many other optical businesses choose to register with the GOC to enhance trust from optical

staff and patients. In a recent independent survey 84 per cent of patients interviewed said they would rather 'use an optical business that meets a certain set of standards, than one that does not'. The GOC encourages all optical businesses, whether registered or not, to comply with the Standards because they represent good practice.

6. What is the GOC doing to ensure that all optical businesses work to the same standards?

The GOC is currently pursuing legislative reform to ensure that all businesses carrying out restricted functions, such as carrying out sight tests, are required to register with the GOC. This would create a more level playing field for all optical businesses and give both patients and practitioners assurance that all optical businesses are regulated.

We are also promoting the value for businesses of registering with the GOC and being able to demonstrate to their patients and staff that they meet our standards.

7. I would like to register my optical business, what do I need to do?

Please visit the GOC website to fill out an application form:

https://www.optical.org/en/Registration/Applying_for_registration/Bodies_corporate.cfm

Alternatively, please email the GOC registration team at registration@optical.org.

8. Who do the new Standards for Optical Businesses apply to?

The Standards are relevant to anyone who works in an optical business or receives eye care or buys spectacles or contact lenses in an optical practice. They have been drafted so that they can be understood by all and will be of particular use to the following:

- Existing GOC business registrants
- Business directors, whether lay or registrant, so that they know their responsibilities, and/or 'responsible officers' within the business
- Optometrists and dispensing opticians working within an optical business
- Patients wanting to know what they can expect from the optical businesses they use

9. How do the new business standards relate to the Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians?

The *Standards for Optical Businesses* have been designed to complement and stand alongside the *Standards of Practice*. Please read both sets of Standards to understand our requirements for both individual practitioners and business registrants. Business registrants are required to allow their optometrist and dispensing optician staff to exercise their professional judgement in fulfilling their duties to patients under the *Standards of Practice*. This requirement is covered in Standard 3.1 of the business standards.

10. What's new in the *Standards for Optical Businesses*?

The new *Standards* cover three broad themes: patients; culture and governance; and staff. In the 'Your Patients' section we detail a range of duties related to supporting patient care including promoting patient safety, raising concerns and gaining valid consent. The standards relating to 'Your Culture and Governance' embrace new areas such as clinical governance, confidentiality and candour. Finally, the section on 'Your Staff', covers training and supervision and collaboration with other healthcare professionals.

11. How are the *Standards for Optical Businesses* used in Fitness to Practise (FTP) complaints against business registrants?

If a complaint is received about a business registrant, we will use the *Standards for Optical Businesses* to help determine whether the conduct of the business registrant has fallen below the expected standards.

12. What types of complaints does the GOC receive about business registrants?

Figures from the last three years show that the most common complaints received about business registrants relate to:

- Optical businesses not having correct procedures in place or not applying their established procedures appropriately
- Poor complaint handling
- Directors of optical businesses failing to declare cautions / convictions

13. I've had a complaint made about my business – will I be held to account against these *Standards*?

Your business will be assessed against the new *Standards* if the incident being complained about happened on or after 1 October 2019.

If the complaint relates to an incident which occurred before 1 October, the complaint will be considered under the *Code of Conduct for business registrants*.

14. Can the *Standards* be applied to online businesses too?

Yes, the *Standards for Optical Businesses* have been drafted so that they can be applied to all types of optical business, including those providing services exclusively online.

15. My business sometimes makes use of locums. How can I make sure everyone's appropriately trained in accordance with Standard 1.2.5 ("Your business ensures that staff utilising equipment, medications and medical devices (including software and other technologies) have undergone appropriate training in their use")?

Whether the people working in your business are employees or locums, your responsibilities in relation to making sure everyone can practice safely are the same – but the ways you might ensure this may vary. With temporary or locum staff, for example, you could make an information pack available about the procedures and technology used in your practice, give them access to an existing staff member for advice or ask for specific skills/experience when recruiting. These are just suggestions – it's important for you to consider what practices are appropriate for your business.

16. What are my business's responsibilities in terms of making information accessible to patients in ways they understand? I'm worried that it will cost me a lot of money to provide interpreters etc. for everyone.

Making information accessible to patients doesn't have to cost money, but you should use your professional judgement to determine the individual needs of patients. Providing written information as well as verbal might be sufficient for some patients or you might decide to allow them to bring someone with them to their appointment to translate/assist with communication.

Patients with learning disabilities might benefit from Easy Read documents, such as those provided by SeeAbility. Others might find video or audio clips a more accessible source of information and advice. It is vital that optical business owners

review their patient base and consider what methods of patient communication would work best.

17. I run a small independent business. How can I ensure I comply with the standards relating to audit and clinical governance?

Clinical governance relates to the methods practitioners use to continuously improve the quality of their services and safeguard high standards of care by creating an environment in which clinical excellence can flourish. In practice this encompasses quality assurance, quality improvement and risk and incident management.

All business registrants, regardless of size, need to ensure that they are reviewing staff and practice performance to ensure mistakes are identified and learnings are shared. The formality and frequency will depend on the size of your business. Larger businesses may have formal processes in place using automated clinical governance systems to sample records. However, this is not essential to meet this standard. Audit does not have to be onerous and can simply include reviewing a sample of patient records at the frequency you consider appropriate. When thinking about how frequently you should review your records, you may wish to consider your staff turnover, i.e. how many records are being generated, how often your registrant staff interact with peers and the level of risk associated with the work you undertake (i.e. if you see a large proportion of vulnerable patients).

Audit should be used to review and reflect on case records to identify themes and trends. It will also flag up any situations which have caused difficulty or uncertainty for a practitioner and may indicate a need for further learning and development (sometimes referred to as a significant event). Where these learning and development areas are identified, small businesses can make use of CET to encourage staff to learn from these events. In particular, peer review is a good way of discussing difficult or unusual cases with other colleagues and is an opportunity to share learning and good practice. Audit may also identify where a process or procedure in your business might be improved. Further advice on clinical governance can also be sought from your professional association, indemnity insurer or representative body.

18. I run a branch of a multiple with a very busy shop floor environment. How can I make sure that patients have privacy if they need it, and that confidentiality is respected, in accordance with Standard 2.4?

Not every interaction with a patient will need to be conducted in a private environment, although one should be made available if discussing confidential matters, or if the patient requests one. Think about how you can avoid inadvertently sharing personal information – using privacy screens on computers could be one way to do this.

All staff members, whether or not GOC registrants, should be aware of the duty of confidentiality, and should receive training appropriate to their role – for example, optical assistants and receptionists will be privy to a lot of patient information and they should receive training on how to keep that information confidential.

19. I run a domiciliary care provider. How can I allow staff to have sufficient time to accommodate a patient's individual needs when our patients all have quite complex ones?

It's your responsibility as an optical business owner to make sure that your staff are able to meet their own professional requirements and provide safe care to patients. If a patient has complex needs, they might need a longer appointment or repeat appointments to ensure they receive the care they need safely. You should advise those working in your business to allow extra time if the patient needs it, and to only undertake what they can do safely within the appointment (and explain this to the patient). Where an additional appointment is required, you should ensure that staff undertake this in a timely manner (i.e. in close proximity to the original appointment) and encourage your staff to explain to patients why the additional appointment is necessary.

20. What does the duty of candour mean for my optical business?

Business registrants must adhere to the professional duty of candour, which is the professional responsibility to be open, honest and transparent when things go wrong.

In addition to the professional duty of candour, some businesses will be subject to a statutory duty of candour, depending on what country they operate in.

England: The statutory duty of candour applies to NHS bodies as well as businesses regulated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), and has been in effect in England since 1 April 2015. More information about this can be found on the Care Quality Commission's (CQC) [website](#).

Scotland: The statutory duty of candour in Scotland came into effect on 1 April 2018 and applies to all organisations that provide a health or social care service. The Scottish government has provided further guidance for organisations on its [website](#).

There is no statutory duty of candour at present in **Wales** or **Northern Ireland**.

Businesses may also be subject to a contractual duty of candour, depending on which bodies they have contracted with. Contracts for NHS services in England, for example, contain a contractual duty of candour and more information about this can be found in the NHS standard contract on the NHS England [website](#).