

RCOphth response to the General Optical Council's consultation on Continuing Education and Training (CET).

September 2018

What do you think are the riskiest areas of work carried out by optometrists and dispensing opticians? How well does the CET scheme address these risks?

With more tests and treatments being carried out in the community, optometrists hold increasing responsibility for deciding how and when to refer patients to hospital eye services. Patients with high risk conditions need optometrists to be able to refer them quickly for urgent care. To ensure these patients are seen quickly by the right person, it is also critical that patients with benign conditions are identified accurately and not sent through the emergency route, so that they do not delay truly urgent cases.

To do this effectively, optometrists must be able to accurately distinguish between high risk conditions, such as papilloedema, and low risk, such as minor optic disc anomalies. We would welcome a more explicit link between holding this responsibility and developing medical knowledge and skills to manage the risks involved.

The CET guidance could be expanded to provide specific support for registrants who have or intend to bring this responsibility within their scope of practice. For example, an effective way to develop these skills is to make arrangements with an experienced ophthalmologist for guidance and to practice identifying high and low risk conditions. Gaining feedback on referrals has also been shown to improve the quality of future decisions about referring.

10. Are there any core areas of practice that optometrists and dispensing opticians should keep their skills and knowledge up to date in?

Common conditions where care and guidelines change rapidly are important areas for all eye health professionals to actively update their knowledge and skills. This includes AMD, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and genetic conditions where new procedures and practice are going to affect large numbers of patients. Optometrists who extend their scope of practice into more medical activities, tests, treatments and decisions should make this a core part of their professional development.

Paediatrics is also a key area. Public Health England's new child vision screening guidance recommends all schools provide eye tests for 4-5 year olds, requiring eye care professionals, including optometrists and dispensing opticians who have the necessary skills and knowledge to accurately detect impaired sight in young children and ensure they receive the right care.

14. What more could the GOC do to support registrants in embedding a culture of reflective practice?

The professional regulators should actively support an open culture of learning and sharing. The GOC could achieve this both through the CETs, emphasising the need to regularly discuss and reflect on incidents, lessons learnt and good practice, as well as providing supportive forums to do so, either through events or conferences or online.

15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach of giving optometrists and dispensing opticians more control over their learning and development?

Agree. The CETs must be responsive to changing roles and responsibilities which focussing on outcomes supports.

16. What are the benefits and challenges of moving towards this approach?

Enabling more focussed professional development means professionals can become more subspecialised which could help some to advance and practice safely as they change their scope of practice. It could also facilitate a more bespoke and interesting development path.

Removing prescriptive requirements requires professionals to be more self-directed in their learning and development, so some support and guidance may be needed to help make this change.

18. To what extent do you agree or disagree that peer review should play a more central role in a scheme which aims to embed a concept of lifelong learning and reflection?

It should play a central role with guidance on how to do this well, including standardised methodology. Peer reviewers must also be clear on what to do if they have significant concerns about a registrant.

23. Do you have any further comments you would like to add on any of the points raised in this consultation?

Overall, we consider that optometrists have an important role to play delivering new models of care, including carrying out traditionally medical activities. To be successful, this shift must recognise the capacity challenge hospital services are facing, how referrals can both ease and contribute to the problem, and the role of CET in developing high levels of competence managing this and playing a valuable part of the system.