



**Optical Consumer
Complaints Service**

Agile and Effective Complaint Resolution

Annual Report 2023-24



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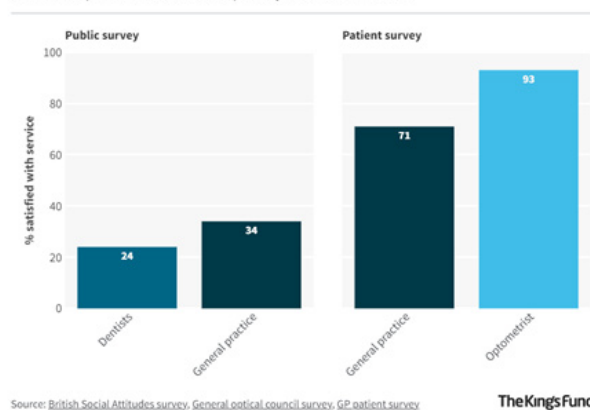
Introduction

Evidence that we aren't quite out of the woods yet, 2023-4 proved to be another challenging year across all industries and sectors. What was once the preserve of the business pages became the focus of the front pages, with daily headlines forecasting economic uncertainty and pressures. With financial pressure and insecurity affecting both practitioners and customers, it's clear that the uncertainty and societal pressures remain potent forces across the United Kingdom. Issuing significant implications on the optical sector, the latest data reveals how both consumer and practitioner behaviour is changing in the face of such pressures. Despite these challenges and changes in consumer behaviour, 2023 research indicates that patient satisfaction with optical professionals remains at a high level (93%), far exceeding satisfaction with other primary care services and an overall trend of decreased satisfaction with NHS services generally. By assessing the data and extracting trends, the latest Optical Consumer Complaint Service ("OCCS") Annual Report provides a comprehensive view of how the sector has been affected over the past year, what the current state of play looks like, and where it's going next.

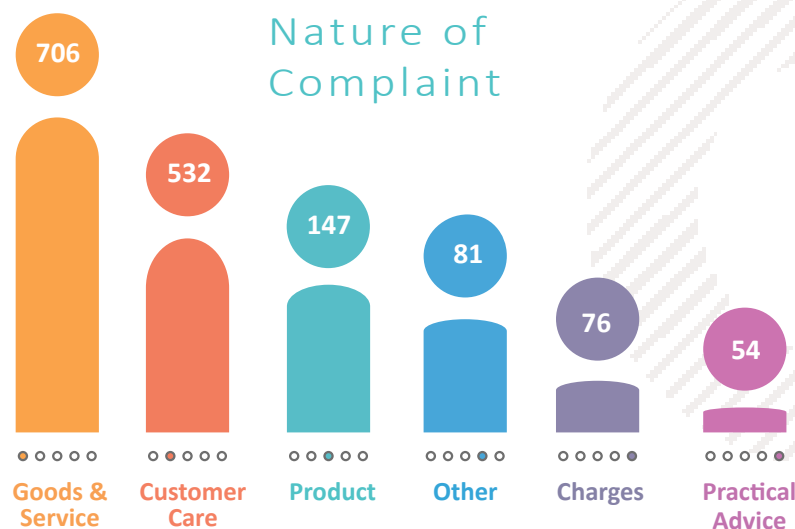
Jennie Jones,
Head of OCCS
Partner at Nockolds Resolution

Public satisfaction with some primary care services was low in 2023

Patient and public satisfaction with primary care services in 2023



Executive Summary



Highlights:

✓ During 2023-24, the OCCS concluded more complaints, than were opened in the 12 month period.

✓ Strong resolution rates mean the OCCS saw a 21% in reduction complaints concluding without a resolution.

✓ Complaints where allegation of misdiagnosis is the substantive concern continue to fall - now almost half the level of 2021/2022.

✓ Record level of CPD delivery with 62 sessions and 3 articles in journals during the year.

The **working relationship** between the **GOC FtP process** and the **OCCS** continues to be **effective**. **81 concerns were referred to the OCCS by the GOC team** in 2023-24. These account for 20% of the concerns received by the GOC during that period.

Complaints relating to **domiciliary services** significantly **increased (statistically) from 42 to 98**



FEEDBACK



86% of users say they would use the OCCS again

94% of users found it easy to access the OCCS

85% of users agreed that the OCCS understood their requirements

76% of users were satisfied with the outcome of their work with the OCCS

86% of users would recommend the OCCS to others



User feedback to the OCCS **remains highly positive**, with the above statistics **illustrating the high quality of service** experienced by users.

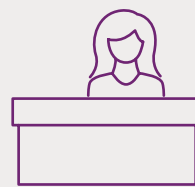
ACCESS TO THE OCCS

63% of complaints received were made by those finding the OCCS online. Other accessed ways were:



Citizens Advice Bureau

33



Practices

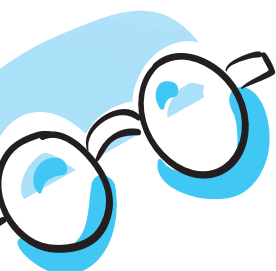
157



Professional Events

42

TIMESCALES



0 - 45 days

51%

46 - 90 days

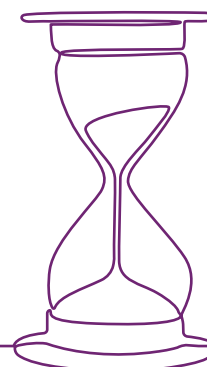
25%

+90 days

24%

Average time period for resolution (all)

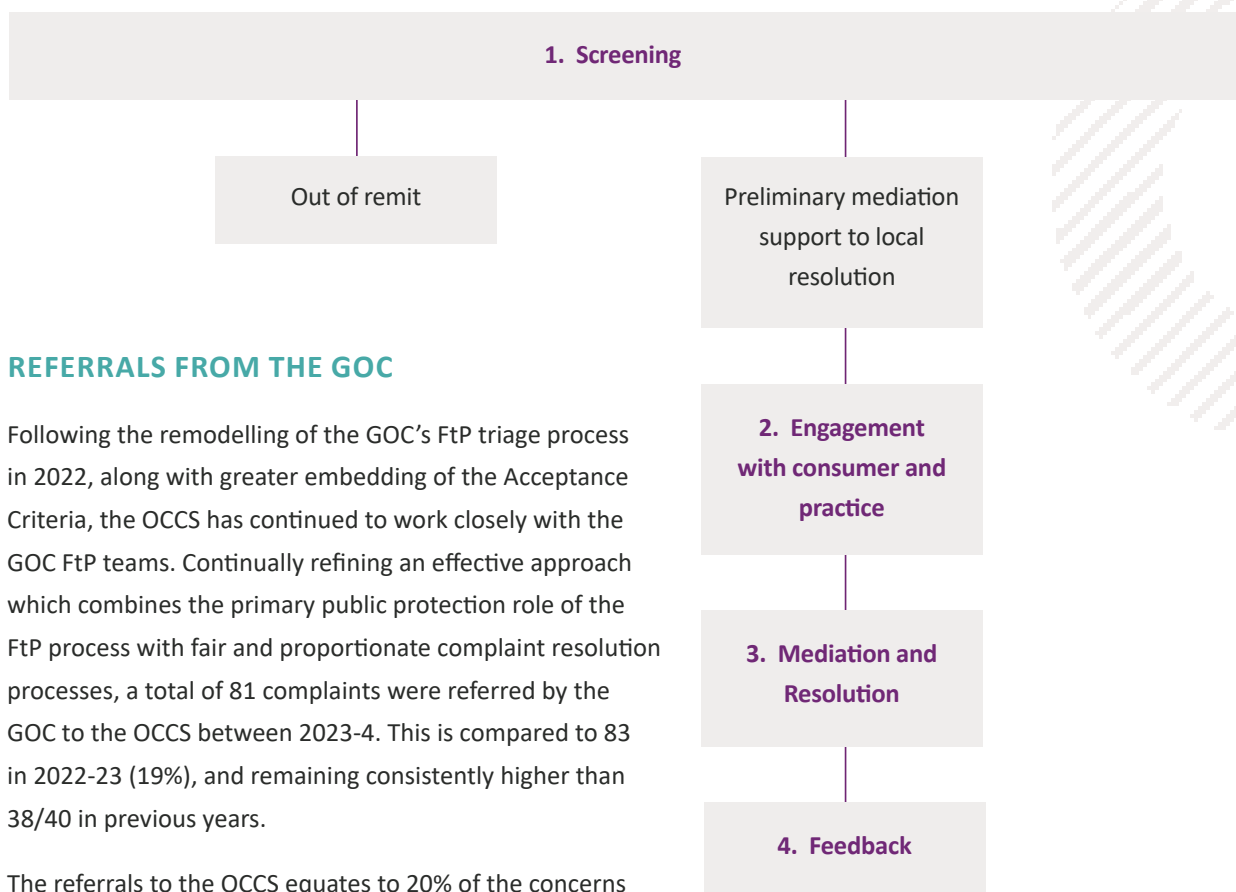
19 days



Accessing the OCCS

Between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024, the OCCS received a total of 1757 complaints, 93% of which fell into remit. This is a 3% increase on complaints received compared with 2022-23. It's crucial to note, too, this continues to reflect an ongoing trend of increased complaint activity across all sectors, and particularly healthcare in recent years. Demonstrating the ongoing efficacy - as well as the growing visibility and accessibility of the service - it is clear that the OCCS remains at the forefront of the minds of consumers and practitioners seeking to resolve complaints proportionately in increasingly challenging times.

OCCS PROCESS




REFERRALS FROM THE GOC

Following the remodelling of the GOC's FtP triage process in 2022, along with greater embedding of the Acceptance Criteria, the OCCS has continued to work closely with the GOC FtP teams. Continually refining an effective approach which combines the primary public protection role of the FtP process with fair and proportionate complaint resolution processes, a total of 81 complaints were referred by the GOC to the OCCS between 2023-4. This is compared to 83 in 2022-23 (19%), and remaining consistently higher than 38/40 in previous years.

The referrals to the OCCS equates to 20% of the concerns received by the GOC (405) and demonstrates that the collaborative work between the two teams remains a dependable route to resolving concerns proportionately. 75% of those referred then proceed with the OCCS process (61 OCCS enquiries).

While the number of enquiries received by the GOC has remained consistent since 2016 (405-425), the number of investigations opened by the GOC has reduced from 293 to 132. When analysing the enquiries not entering the FtP process, nearly half (47%, 81) are referred to the OCCS for resolution showing the



positive impact of the remodelling of the GOC triage process and the OCCS input. The ability to refer to the OCCS has assisted the GOC FtP team in developing a time effective process which triages and refers complainants swiftly, to a proportionate, alternative resolution pathway with high satisfaction to a service. This is underpinned by the reassurance that the OCCS will refer back the concern if FtP allegations are subsequently identified within the mediation process.


Six cases were referred from the OCCS to the GOC during the year where an issue that necessitated FtP review emerged during OCCS involvement. This includes concerns where the complainant felt they needed the GOC to consider their complaint, but was not considered by the OCCS to potentially amount to an FtP allegation.

It is also crucial to acknowledge that in addition to direct referrals by the FtP team and those complainants given details of the OCCS, there are also complainants who will self triage via the GOC or the OCCS websites. There is ongoing collaboration between the OCCS and the GOC team to improve this pathway and ensure that complaints are more efficiently triaged for faster turnaround times.

The excellent work the GOC are now doing with their employer forum along with increasing profile in CPD arena should give the public and the profession great confidence that complaints are being managed in a proportionate and pragmatic manner.

DIRECT ACCESS

Of all complaints received between 2023-4, 63% were made by those finding the OCCS online, either by way of a search engine or social media platform. Consistent with last year's data - there was only a negligible decrease in consumers seeking details of the OCCS directly. There are other data points which should be considered when analysing how users of the OCCS initially access the service. These include:



Citizens Advice Bureau

The Citizens Advice Bureau referred 33 users to the OCCS; which is consistent with 2022-23 as a % of enquiries received.




Practices

Practices referring a total of 157 users to the OCCS; a significant increase of 47% when compared to the previous year, being 93 from the practice responding to the complaint, and 64 from another practice who shares contact details for the OCCS.



Professional Events

Professional events also enabled the OCCS to extend the reach of its service, with 42 disputes making their way to the OCCS via this source; consistent when compared year-on-year.

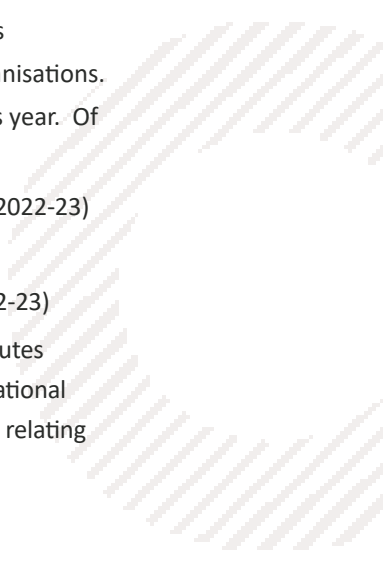


Altogether, the access routes into the OCCS reveal that consumers are able to easily locate the service online, whilst public bodies like the Citizens Advice Bureau and professional practices place a growing trust and confidence in the OCCS. This data alone is compelling when determining the reputation of the OCCS in the optical sector.

There is always more work to be done to ensure consumers are aware of the OCCS when they can escalate an optical consumer complaint. The OCCS also continues to raise the profile of the service with practices and optical professionals in terms of resolution activity, insight sharing and CPD.

CONSUMER COMPLAINTS REMIT

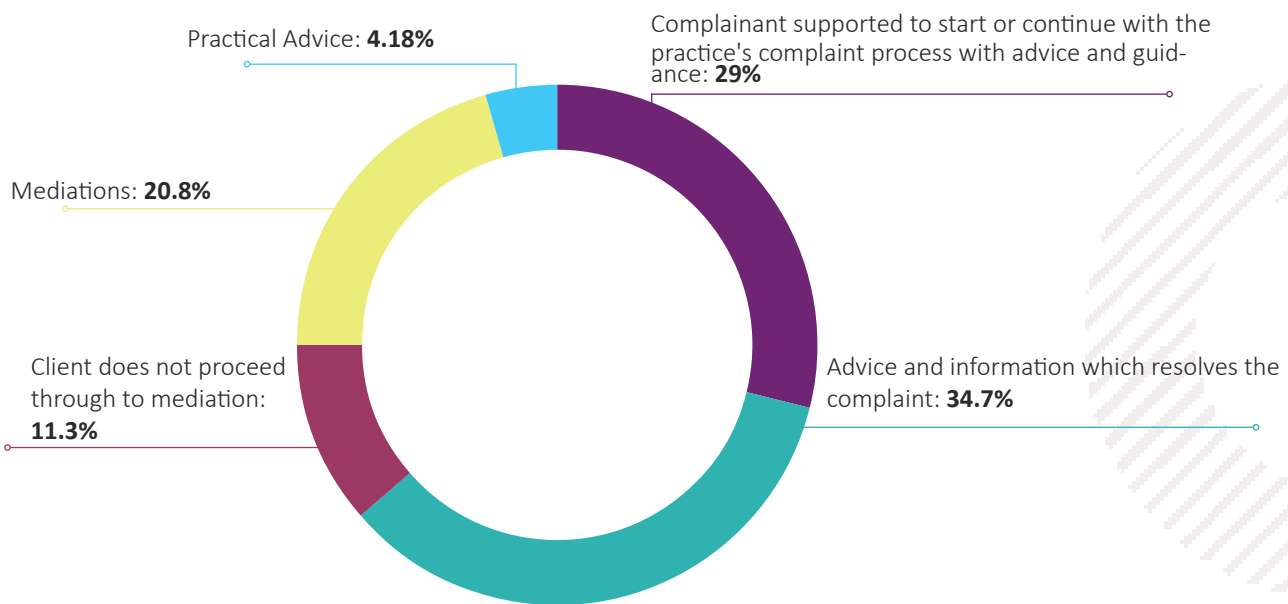
92% of all enquiries received between 2023-4 fell within remit of the OCCS, with 125 complaints involving issues or parties that sit outside the OCCS remit or being forwarded to alternative organisations. This is consistent with the number of out of remit complaints when compared with the previous year. Of the complaints which fell outside of the OCCS' remit:

- a) Complaints involving claims for compensation arising from clinical negligence – 26 (41 in 2022-23)
 - b) Complainant bringing the concern to the GOC FtP team - 6 (5 in 2022-23)
 - c) Complaint relates to a practice not registered with GOC or non UK business 60 (44 in 2022-23)
 - d) Complaint involves other non-consumer issues – 33. These included private financial disputes between an optical practice and an individual (not a consumer), employment disputes, national advertising campaigns (referred to Advertising Standards Authority and GOC), complaints relating to matters which occurred more than 12 months ago.
- 

OCCS Complaint Resolution

Between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, the OCCS concluded 1800 enquiries. This is an increase of 12% compared with 2022-23.

Reviewing the 1675 complaints that fell inside of the remit of the OCCS, these are the following outcomes:




Full data available at Appendix 1.

SUPPORTING LOCAL RESOLUTION

During 2023-24, the OCCS saw an increase of 27% in the number of enquiries handled at the Phase A stage of the OCCS process (1064, compared with 840 in 2022-23). The increase was mainly seen in enquiries concluded with advice at that stage and no further escalating action by the consumer.

This may be linked to increase propensity to complain and potentially a consequence of greater financial pressures on household incomes which lead consumers to look to recover money where they are less than satisfied with a service or product. This analysis is informed by the increase in 'OCCS advice' category which can include consumers seeking a 'steer' on whether the situation or position of the practice is acceptable. In order to meet this demand effectively and maintain pace in mediations, we have invested more resource in Phase A.

Just under two thirds of OCCS enquiries in 2023-24 were still within the practice's complaint process, and are therefore considered "open", with a possibility of being resolved at a local level. The OCCS team provides early resolution input and support, which engages the consumer in the local resolution process whilst also seeking to calm, de-escalate and enable the complaint to progress constructively. In some cases, the consumer has started the complaint process but is disappointed that pace of the process does



not meet their expectation. In other cases, the complaint has not yet been raised with the practice, and consumers are seeking input. Complaints being referred to the OCCS at this stage have remained the dominant category over the past three years.


This input supports effective local resolution in helping the complaint to be progressed at that local level in a de-escalated, more informed and focused way. This increases the likelihood of resolution, improve consumer confidence in the practice and the profession generally, and providing a commercial, economic and staff wellbeing benefit for practices.

Consumers are informed that they can revert to the OCCS if the complaint is resolved by the practice locally. Complainants returning to the OCCS for mediation following early local resolution support account for less than 3.5% of enquiries, demonstrating the commitment of optical practices to resolve consumer concerns and the effectiveness of the OCCS support in this phase.

PRACTICE ADVICE

OCCS receives contact from optical practices seeking assistance and support with local resolution of complaints. In 2023-4, 4% of enquiries were received from optical practices seeking input and guidance. This is consistent with the previous 2 years (70, 68 and 67 respectively).

CONSUMER NOT PROCEEDING WITH MEDIATION



As consumers choose to contact the OCCS, the overwhelming majority proceed with the mediation process when attempts at local complaint resolution have been exhausted. Around 10% of consumers may choose not to progress their complaint through the OCCS process. In 2023-24, 190 consumers did not progress with mediation. This represents an encouraging 24% decrease when compared with the previous year's data. Whilst the OCCS does not proactively explore or quantify the reasons why a consumer does not proceed with mediation, there are a number of potential reasons:

- The opportunity to discuss their complaint with an impartial third party is sufficient to bring closure for the consumer.
- The consumer seeks an adjudication based process and does not consider mediation to be the avenue for their complaint.
- The consumer reflects and decides to accept a previous resolution offered by the practice.
- There is a greater willingness to accept the advice provided by the OCCS, and whilst consumers are seeking financial resolutions, they appreciate the legal principles that determine whether a refund is due and owing.

Closely following this trend in the coming months and years will help to identify broader consumer sentiment.

MEDIATIONS AND RESOLUTION

Where local resolution does not address and conclude a complaint, the OCCS will engage with the consumer and the practice to mediate and help the parties agree a resolution.

The OCCS mediated 348 complaints which is 7% more mediations than were conducted in 2022-23, with 275 concluding with a resolution.

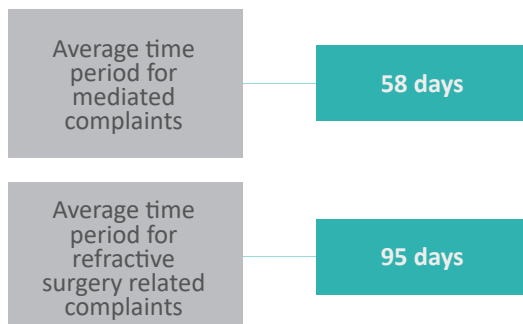
The number of mediations concluding without a resolution decreased by 21% to 70 during 2023-24.

In feedback from consumers at the conclusion of mediation, 57% of responders indicated they would return to the practice following resolution of their complaint through OCCS mediation. This is an increase from 44% in previous years. This data illustrates the benefits of an effective resolution process that seeks to rebuild trust and the relationship between complainant and the practice, supporting trust and confidence in the profession as a whole.

TIMESCALES

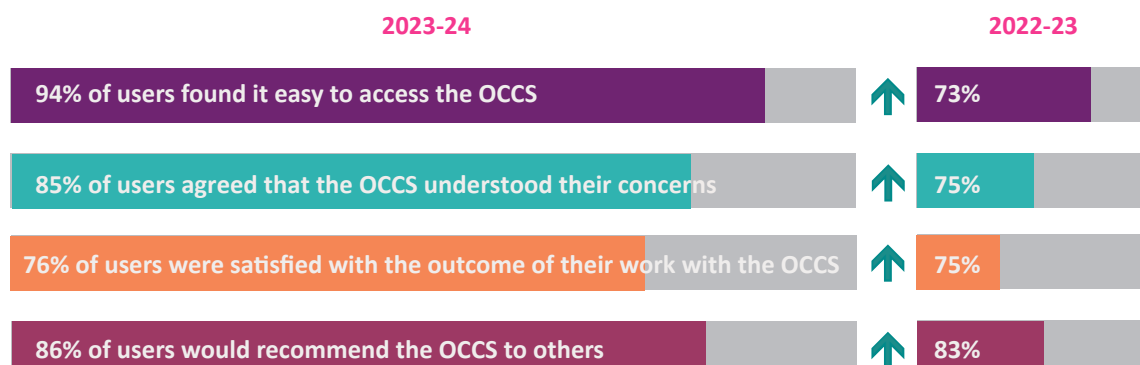



This is indicative of parties with more entrenched positions which means while the team has maintained higher resolution rates, it has taken longer to reach a successful resolution through mediation.



FEEDBACK

User feedback to the OCCS remains highly positive, with the following statistics illustrating the high quality of service experienced by users. The response rate to requests for feedback is at 14% which is strong for a feedback process, which cannot offer give-aways or promotional incentives.





“The OCCS team go above and beyond to ensure that they work in a supportive role with practices to ensure that the concerns and needs of the patient are met. Their approach is also to inform, educate and coach on the themes of issues that they see coming through so that our group of practices can learn and continually improve their practice and service to patients”


Hakim Group – Claire Slade, Head of Professional Advancement and Governance

“ASDA Opticians have been really pleased with the relationship we have built with the OCCS, which has allowed us to work together with them to resolve any patient concerns quickly and fairly. They are always professional, knowledgeable and pragmatic when working with us. We will often signpost our patients to OCCS if they wish to have a second opinion on a concern or support and we have found that this approach has helped with patient satisfaction with concern resolution. The benefit of OCCS both to the patient, performers & businesses I believe is significant & is down to their skills & expertise of mediation & the industry.”

Sarah Joyce, Head of Optical & Superintendent Optometrist, Asda Opticians

“We have always found all the team at Nockolds a delight, approachable and highly pragmatic to deal with which makes things so much easier when dealing with the challenges in this area; and having fostered such a good relationship it makes reaching the right outcome for the customer straightforward.”

Optical Practice, engaged in OCCS mediation

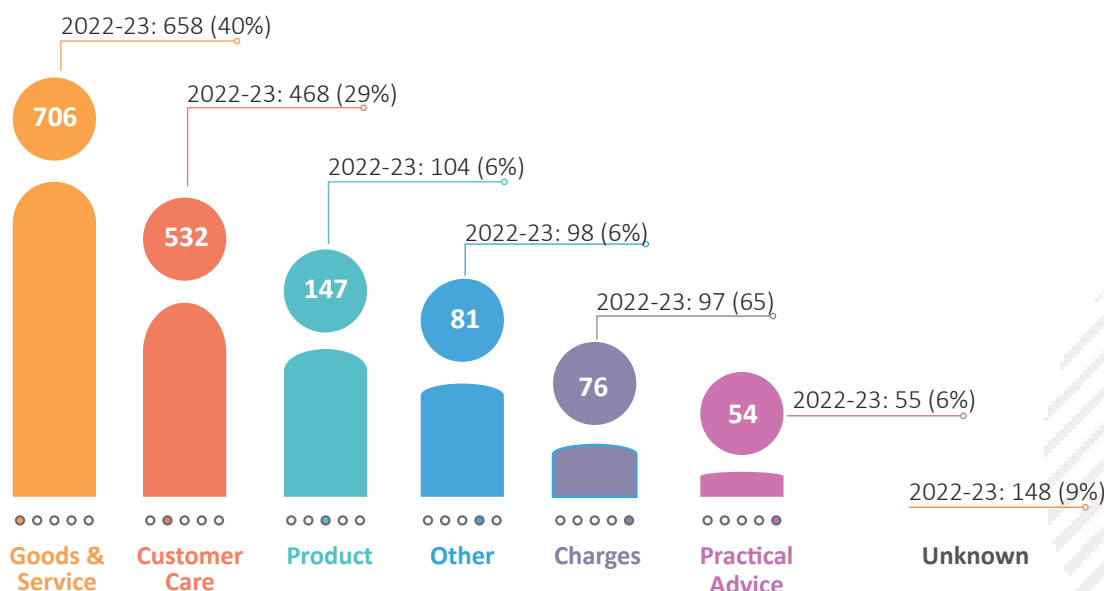


In addition to these quantitative outputs, qualitative feedback also revealed how members of the OCCS were recognised for their professional approach to complaints and went to extra lengths to ensure that the needs of different users were satisfactorily met.

Whilst highly positive and encouraging in many respects, the OCCS is committed to doing as much as possible to improve the metrics by which it measures user satisfaction. Accomplished by designing and delivering a continuous improvement plan, the improvement on previous user response data is clear evidence that this approach is effective.

Complaint Insights

NATURE OF COMPLAINT



The OCCS annual report shares an overview of the complaint insight captured during the year. This is based on qualitative and quantitative insight and year on year comparisons.

Full data sets can be found in the appendices.

BUSINESS TYPE AND REGION

Independent (%)	21%
Multiple (%)	79%

Nearly 80% complaint enquiries received involve practices within a group (corporate, JVP and franchises), and 20% relate to practices owned independently. Industry data suggests this reflects market share proportions.

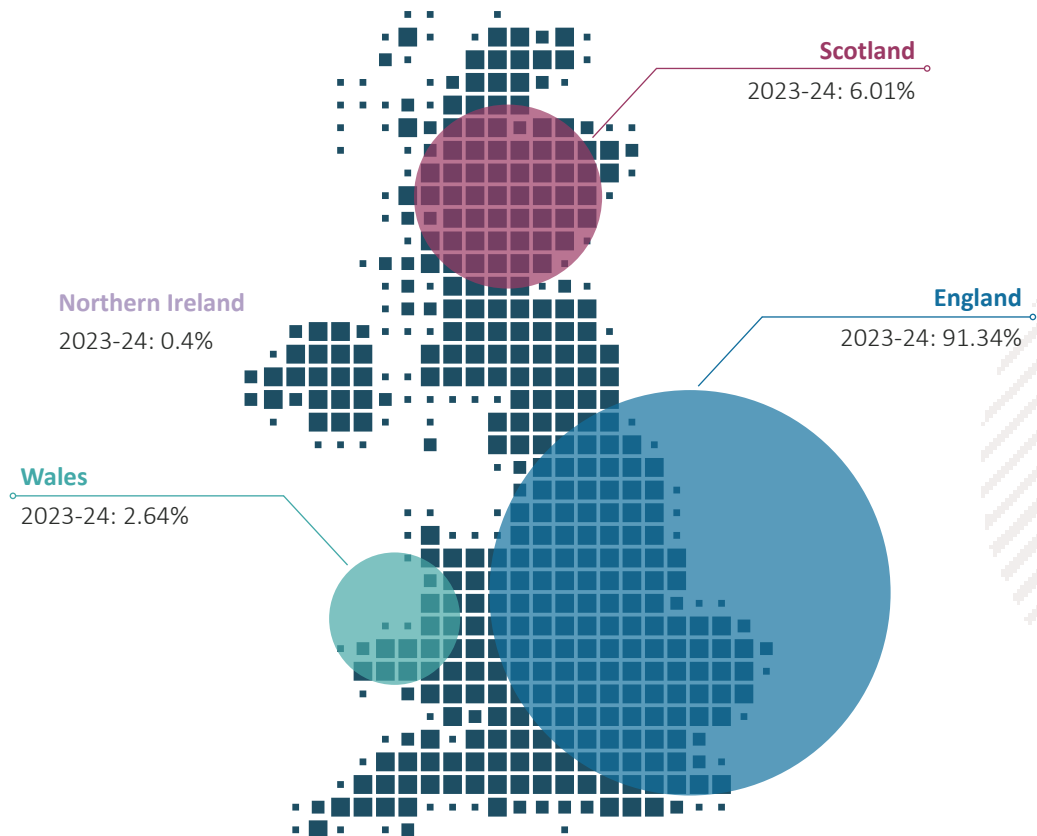
When analysing the complaints received, the nature of complaints are consistent across both business types.

A higher proportion of practice advice contacts are received from independent practices, which is to be expected as practices within multiple groups have access to support services within their organisations.

In terms of outcomes, interestingly the OCCS has handled more complaints, involving practices from within a Multiple, in the local resolution phase (Phase A) compared with complaints concerning independent practices. In previous years, the proportion of complaints handled in Phase A was higher for independent practices. This was expected given the availability of central office customer care teams.

This year's variance may be linked to increased consumer societal tensions and propensity or willingness to seek resolution from a corporate body or entity, more complaints being concluded by those groups at this stage in the process or other factors that may be influencing behaviour. The OCCS will continue to keep this under review and share insight through the year with the GOC.

REGION



CONSUMER DEMOGRAPHIC INSIGHT

Details of the EDI analysis are published in Appendix 4.

SUMMARY OF COMPLAINT MEDIATION INSIGHT

- Complaints relating to domiciliary services more than doubled this year from 42 to 98.
- Triage collaboration continues to be effective conduit to get concerns to the appropriate channel for resolution. This year the GOC referred 81 complaints over to OCCS from total of 405 going into FtP, and of those, 61 proceeded with the OCCS mediation process.
- Complaints where allegation of misdiagnosis is the substantive concern continue to fall -now almost half the level of 21/22.
- Record level of CPD delivery with 62 sessions and 3 articles in journals during the year.

Analysis - consumer cites prescription error as primary concern up from 183 to 230

Figures in brackets are 2022-23

	Return to practice with advice	Out of Remit	Advice only/ resolved early stage	Mediation successful	Mediation unsuccessful	Live	Total
Quality of Examination	16 (21)	11 (8)	7 (24)	16 (7)	7 (6)	1 (3)	52 (50)
Optometrist customer care	20 (19)	12 (12)	12 (9)	7 (7)	1 (2)	4 (3)	57 (52)
Rx Error	78 (70)	33 (9)	69 (23)	29 (32)	8 (14)	13 (15)	230 (163)
							339 (285)

The most significant insight this year has been the ability of the OCCS team to address more prescription error concerns through advice or early stage mediation up from 23 to 69. This increase broadly covers the uplift in total complaints in this area (183 to 230) and reflects the team commitment to pacy proportionate resolution. All other data points remarkably consistent year on year.

Analysis - consumer cites misdiagnosis as primary concern have almost halved in two years

	Return to practice with advice	Out of Remit	Advice only	Mediation successful	Mediation unsuccessful	Live	Total
Cataract	1 (4)	2 (1)	1 (1)	2 (1)	0 (3)	1 (2)	7 (12)
Glaucoma	3 (1)	0 (1)	1 (4)	(1)	--	(2)	4 (9)
Ret Det/ PVD	2 (0)	--	4 (2)	2	--	1	9 (2)
ARMD	1 (4)	--	1 (1)	(1)	--	--	3 (7)
Misc	5 (2)	5 (2)	2 (4)	1 (4)	0 (1)	--	14 (14)
	9 (11)	4 (4)	6 (14)	4 (7)	0 (4)	2 (4)	33 (44)

We have seen a significant reduction in complaints relating to potential misdiagnosis over the past two years from an outlier peak of 63 cases in 21/22 to just 33 this year. In the 2021-22 year, the OCCS saw a significant statistical increase in complaints relating to cataracts (possibly a post pandemic bounceback of elderly patients returning to practices) this seems to have fallen back to a historical run rate.

Given our high level of CPD activity in the area of Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) complaint management since 2020 we are pleased to see another significant drop in AMD complaints.

We continue to address the majority of these complaints through referral to practice with preliminary mediation, advice and local resolution support. This approach reflects the increasing capability and confidence of OCCS Resolution Managers in this arena underpinned by the clarity of the GOC Acceptance Criteria concerning single clinical issue and our close working relationship with GOC FtP triage team.

The complaints falling outside of remit were a combination of consumers wanting to refer the matter to the GOC or to adamant they wanted to pursue legal avenues for redress. These were signposted accordingly.

Analysis - complaints involving refractive surgery – Significant increase in successful mediations

	Return to provider with advice	Out of Remit	Client chose not to pursue	Advice only	Fully/partially successful mediation		Live	Total
Charges & Refunds	2 (3)		(1)	1 (1)	5 (0)			9 (5)
Outcome of Surgery LASIK/LASEK	13 (6)	3 (6)	4 (7)	21 (15)	12 (14)	5 (9)	4 (8)	67 (65)
Aftercare	1 (3)	2 (0)	--	8 (1)	5 (0)	--	--	15 (4)
Complaint Mgt	(1)	--	1 (0)	1 (6)	2 (1)	0 (3)	--	4 (11)
Attitudinal	1 (2)	0 (1)	--	--	--	--	--	2 (3)
Misc	0 (1)	--	--	0 (1)	--	--	--	0 (3)
Total	17 (16)	5 (8)	5 (8)	24 (24)	25 (15)	6 (12)	9 (8)	97 (91)

The standout data in this area is the significant increase in the success rate up of mediations up from 56% to 80%. Empirical data showing an increase in the number of successful mediations from 15 to 25 demonstrates this percentage increase is not skewed by a 'picking winners' approach. Given the nature of many of these outcomes they are subject to NDA agreements between the provider and patient.

This has been underpinned by building effective and robust working relationships with the surgery provider.


Many cases relate to a disappointment in the refractive outcome and we would encourage any potential patients to be vigilant and cognisant of the detailed consent process in the area of elective surgery.

OVERALL INSIGHTS

Communication in Clinical Complaints

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

One area to note is the emerging trend of complaints relating to interpretation of OCT scans. It is essential that registrants keep their skills up to date in this area of clinical practice. This is particularly important for




mobile or locum practitioners who may use different models of OCT on a regular basis. It is a registrants accountability to make sure they are competent in the analysis of their OCT scans.

Domiciliary - Domiciliary complaints have more than doubled this year from 42 to 98

In recent years, the OCCS has identified the importance of accessibility to eye healthcare and to complaint pathways for vulnerable consumer groups. The OCCS has previously highlighted the need for transparent and effective customer care in domiciliary settings. These concerns around potentially vulnerable patients illustrate why this sector must be vigilant in all areas of practice and conduct. A doubling of complaints should be alarming for all who work in this important area of practice.

This year the most significant sub sector within domiciliary complaints relates to delay in supply or more concerningly non supply. We are currently dealing with one provider with multiple issues around non supply and keeping the GOC informed of our progress in this matter.

Data suggests consumers complaining of pressure to buy is more prevalent in this area of the sector with allegations of overselling being the substantive issue in three cases (OCCS only recorded 23 for entire industry). Domiciliary complaints represent just 2.6% of total complaints but 13% of the allegations of overselling. Given the vulnerable nature of the patient base and our work in raising awareness in the domiciliary sector, this is of continued frustration to the OCCS. Whilst this is an empirically low number, the sense or perception of overselling is an undertone in many of the domiciliary concerns we deal with.



From the appearance of domiciliary providers 'doorstepping' consumers to have an eye examination, through a perception of overselling expensive product, delayed or non supply to the reluctance to refund when problems occur it is easy to see why families raise concerns in this arena. Whilst there is no doubt the majority of practitioners in this area are committed to delivering great, and essential, service there remains a significant risk that some outliers create a negative impression to society. The OCCS continues to work closely with the key stakeholders in this area and continue to provide CPD to this sector to try and raise awareness and standards.

Expectation of a financial resolution

Anecdotal Resolution Manager insight and reflections indicate that financial pressures and the cost-of-living crisis have played a part in the complaints mediated by the OCCS. Consumers seeking and pursuing a financial resolution has been more prevalent this year. It is notable that practices, although facing commercial pressures themselves, continue to be open to exploring the reasons for the consumer's dissatisfaction within the mediation process and consider appropriate ways to resolve the issues raised.



OCCS Impact

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The OCCS continue to invest in stakeholder relationships to:

- Support trust in the service by the optical professions and consumer representatives;
- Aid insight sharing across the 4 nations;
- Contribute OCCS insight into stakeholder strategic plans and policies;
- Collaborate with stakeholder upstreaming.

CPD ACTIVITY

Over the past year, there was a record level of CPD delivery with 62 sessions delivered, clinical articles, and a wide range of articles, blogs and insight sharing published in journals across 2023-4.

Working with thousands of registrants, the OCCS received consistently high feedback (ranging from 96 to 100%) and is expected to deliver a consistently high volume of sessions in the remainder of 2024. Identifying a shift from online sessions to in-person events, the latest CPD events also reveal a possible return to “the previous normal”.

Developments in the CPD arena include a transition from CET to CPD, allowing the OCCS to offer broader CPD content beyond the clinical and complaint handling topics to include coaching as well as leadership content as part of its offering.

The OCCS continues to deliver CPD content at national industry conferences such as 100% Optical, National Optometric Conference and Association of Opticians events. In addition to these conferences, the OCCS is also well represented at large corporate sector events, sustaining and building its profile as a knowledgeable partner when it comes to the subject of FTP change and improvement.

In recent years, in order to improve its reach and impact, the OCCS has formed strategic partnerships with organisations such as The Macular Society, Topcon and Coopervision to create and deliver new CPD content collaboratively with their own clinical teams. This year, the OCCS has also started to co-create and deliver CPD content with the FtP team to disseminate insights, themes and trends from historical FtP cases to frontline practitioners.

In 2023, the OCCS developed new streams of activity to leverage complaint insights to feed into the UK optometry education system. By collaborating with WOPEC, the service has successfully delivered its first complaint insight webinar for the Post Graduate Paediatric Optometry Programme. Following very positive feedback, the OCCS is scheduled to repeat this for the next cohort. In addition to this success, the OCCS has also created a Year Two customer care/complaint management/communication skills module with a UK Optometry Undergraduate Programme which will roll out later on in 2024. As part of its commitment to raising standards, the OCCS would welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively with any academic programme in the sector to replicate this module and integrate it into their undergraduate syllabus.

Ultimately, the CPD activity from the OCCS continues at pace and continues to grow in significant areas.

SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY/ENGAGEMENT

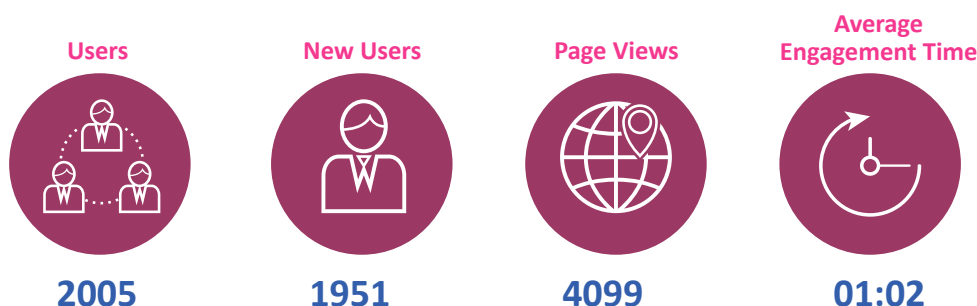
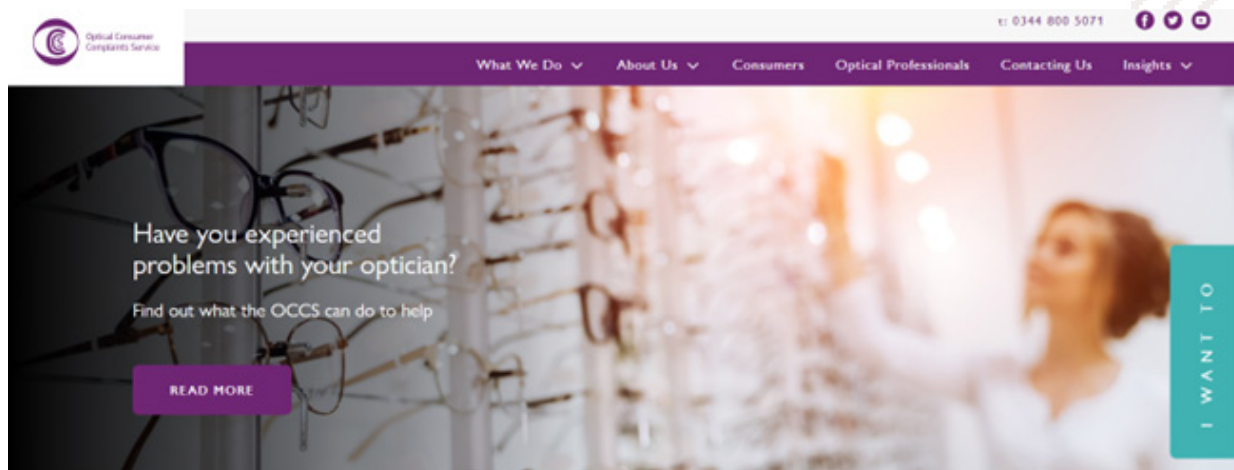
Remaining highly active across a range of social media platforms, the OCCS has continued to raise awareness of the service and its various offerings through the creation and sharing of informative blogs on timely subjects. Similarly, by recognising and promoting a series of key awareness days, it has been possible to grow a following of highly relevant and engaged professionals.

This strategy has been strengthened by building effective relationships with the likes of the Local Optical Committee Support Unit (LOSCU). By partnering on webinars which highlight the work of the OCCS, as well as working collaboratively on CPD masterclasses, it has been possible to create a range of compelling content which has been well-received and shared across social media.

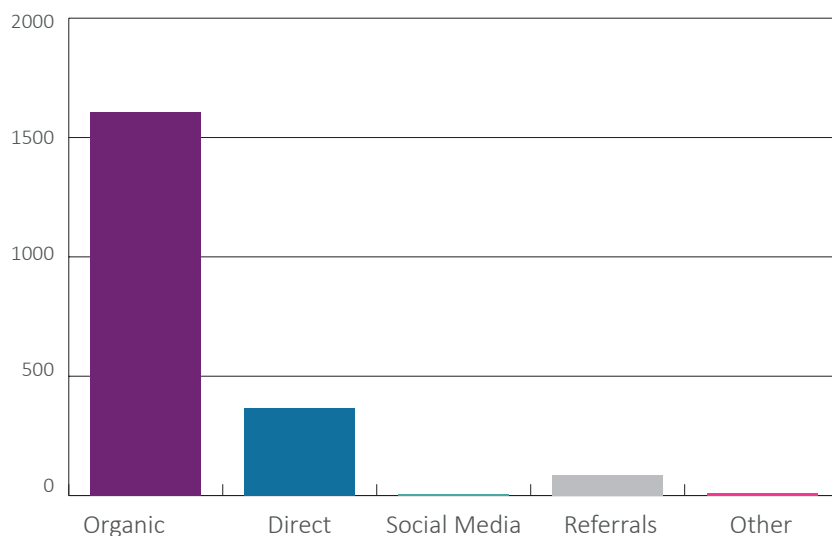
Similarly, the OCCS has worked closely with the GOC to identify and cover popular topics in the sector, leveraging their following to increase the overall reach that the OCCS receives across social media. Other ongoing partnerships also include ABDO and publications such as the Optical Press which regularly share OCCS contributions in their work.

Bringing all of this work together, a quarterly newsletter is sent to a high quality and relevant audience which has enabled the OCCS to grow its social media following as well as effectively distributing its activity to an ever-increasing number of professionals.

THE OCCS WEBSITE



Website Visitors (Average 2023-24)



CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

In terms of EDI access, the OCCS has responded to the current climate to ensure that teams are well-equipped and supported when dealing with complaints. To this end, the OCCS has carried out a series of training sessions that have enabled teams to enlarge their areas of expertise. In particular, the team undertook a course in Managing Difficult and Distressing Conversations that provided them with a suite of skills to hone their skills and approaches to managing the diverse needs of OCCS users. Similarly, this training empowers teams to meaningfully listen and respond to complaints with empathy, drawing from a toolkit of questions and responses which enable the OCCS Resolution Managers and Mediation Coordinators to adapt the skills and experience, offering agility and a person centered approach, founded in empathy and compassionate curiosity. The team will be able to provide the correct responses and ask the correct questions. Additionally, this course provided the team with the knowledge necessary to respond effectively in an emergency and engage in difficult conversations with confidence. Ultimately, this course provided the OCCS with the skills that distressing situations and customers with mental health challenges require. With the ability to engage empathetically, the training focussed on active listening and how to best support colleagues and customers who are involved in a complaint.

The team is also supported by the EDI and neurodiversity champions who assist the team in delivering an effective and accessible service to all service user groups.

The OCCS has also been attentive to the needs of neurodivergent colleagues and consumers and is working hard to broaden the toolkit to enable teams to engage effectively. In particular, awareness has recently been growing in terms of understanding the prevalence of neurodiversity in society and the impact that it can have on the daily lives of those who process information differently. An estimated one in seven people in the UK and 15-20% worldwide are neurodivergent, with numbers on the rise. Statistics therefore suggest that those with neurodivergent conditions make up a substantial proportion of our workforces and customer bases. By focussing on this particular issue, the OCCS has built a robust toolkit for when teams are adapting the process and approach to enable access and also to support all service users in participating in mediation.



Next Chapter

2024-25 OBJECTIVES



1	Share insight and analysis from OCCS activity to support a culture of continuous improvement across the sector, and further develop channels of communication with the GOC in order to leverage OCCS insights for increasingly agile regulation and to prevent harm.
2	Support the FtP team to further develop ways of working that will support the GOC to deal with cases as quickly as is consistent with a fair and proportionate outcome, and maintain the required performance standards assessed by the PSA.
3	Improve accessibility for vulnerable service users which includes, but is not limited to consumers and optical professionals who are neurodiverse, consider themselves to have a disability and those who are vulnerable by virtue of the situation or environment, to support access to and the effectiveness of mediation for optical consumers and professionals.
4	Proactively engage in the development and implementation of the GOC new 5 year Strategic Plan with particular focus on the business standards review to aid practice and consumer understanding and the role of regulation and standards in complaint management.





Appendix 1: Outcomes

Outcomes (All)

	2023-24	2022-23	+/-
Out Of Remit	125	121	6.9%
Phase A - Supporting local resolution	1067	840	59.3%
Referred To Practice	485	518	26.9%
Concluded with Advice	582	322	32.3%
Client Not To Pursue	190	249	10.5%
Resolved on mediation	275	233	15.3%
Mediation unsuccessful	73	92	4.1%
Practice Advice	70	68	3.9%
Grand Total Closed Complaints	1800	1603	100.0%

Outcomes (GOC Referrals)



	Outcome
Phase A: Supporting local resolution	53.5%
Referred to Practice - Local Resolution	27.6%
Advice Only	25.8%
Client Not to Pursue	25.8%
Resolved on Mediation	17.2%
Mediation Unsuccessful	3.4%
Grand Total	100%




Appendix 2: Complaint Nature


Nature of Complaint

	2023-24	2023-24 %
Charges	76	4%
Customer Care	532	30%
Goods & Service	706	40%
Other	81	5%
Practice Advice	54	3%
Product	147	8%
Unknown	160	9%
Grand Total of Received Complaints	1756	100%

	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22
Goods & Service	706	658	796
Cataract	7	2	4
Concerns with the examination	45	42	84
Dispense of varifocal	76	112	84
Dispensing	142	118	162
Error with prescription	213	184	222
Eye Test	6	7	2
Missed diagnosis	34	44	66
Outcome of Laser eye surgery	42	40	89
Outcome of lens replacement surgery	37	25	
Prescription prescribed in one practice and dispensed in another	73	44	66
Reglaze - issue with consumers own frame	8	13	16
Unknown	23	27	1
Customer Care	532	468	540
After care	23	20	16
Alleged inappropriate selling	21	19	28
Attitude	60	68	106
Complaint handling	59	58	66



	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22
Consumer change of mind	22	23	25
Delay in supply	94	53	98
Dispensing Optician Customer Care	4	2	
Excluded from store	2	6	13
Failure to deal with concerns/complaint	137	92	60
Laser surgery - complaint handling	8	9	3
NHS Voucher query	15	26	37
No prescription provided	18	17	28
Non qualified staff issues	3	4	4
Optom customer care	48	52	43
Pupillary Distance - entitlement	2	2	13
Unknown	16	17	
Product	147	104	117
Contact lenses	8	5	5
Product - frames	97	68	79
Product - lense coating	19	19	23
Product - lenses	20	8	10
Unknown	1	1	0
Varifocals - quality	2	3	0
Other	81	98	128
Miscellaneous	74	92	122
Practitioner query	1	1	2
Prescription - content	1	-	-
Unknown	5	5	4
Charges	76	97	73
Charges and offer	74	94	71
Unknown	2	3	2
Practice Advice	54	55	66
Unknown	54	55	66
Unknown	160	148	14
Grand Total	1756	1628	1734





Appendix 3: Business Types

Business Types - Nature of Received Complaint

	Multiple	Independent
Charges	4.2%	5.8%
Customer Care	34.6%	31.9%
Goods & Service	43.5%	40.6%
Other	2.4%	3.3%
Practice Advice	1.1%	7.9%
Product	9.2%	9.1%
Unknown	4.9%	1.2%

Multiple Practices (Closed Complaints)

	Outcome
Out Of Remit	5%
Phase A: Supporting local resolution	58%
Referred to Practice - Local Resolution	29%
Concluded Advice	29%
Client Not to Pursue	8%
Resolved on Mediation	21%
Mediation Unsuccessful	5%
Practice Advice	3%



Independent Practices (Closed Complaints)

	Outcome
Out Of Remit	5%
Phase A: Supporting local resolution	49%
Referred to Practice - Local Resolution	28%
Concluded with Advice	21%
Client Not to Pursue	10%
Resolved on Mediation	22%
Mediation Unsuccessful	6%
Practice Advice	8%





Appendix 4: EDI Data

The OCCS requests EDI data from consumers accessing the service. The data below is compared against national data from ONS and other government sources.

Full details of the national data sources are available on request.

Age Range

	Age Range 2023-24	Comparison with National Data
16-24	2%	11.7%
25-34	7%	13.5%
35-44	13%	13%
45-54	20%	13.3%
55-64	28%	12.6%
65 or over	29%	18.5%
Under 16	1%	20.8%



Gender

	Gender 2023-24	Comparison with National Data
Female	60%	50.4%
Male	40%	49.2%
Non-binary	0%	0.4%

Disability Under Equality Act

	Disability 2023-24	Comparison with National Data
No	76%	82.2%
Yes	24%	17.8%



Ethnicity

	Ethnicity 2023-24	Comparison with National Data
Asian	14%	9.3%
Black	4%	4.0%
Mixed	3%	2.9%
Other	4%	2.1%
White	75%	81.7%

Sexual Orientation

	Sexual Orientation 2023-24	Comparison with National Data
Bisexual	2%	2%
Gay	2%	2.7%
Heterosexual	94%	93.6%
Other	2%	1.7%



Relationship Status

	Relationship Status 2023-24	Comparison with National Data
Married	51%	40.7%
Single	26%	47.5%
Divorced	9%	6.6%
Widowed	6%	0.1%
Prefer Not To Say	4%	Not a category in ONS Census
Civil Partnership	2%	4.9%
Separated	2%	Not a category in ONS Census

Religion

	Religion 2023-24	Comparison with National Data
Buddhist	0%	0.5%
Christian	48%	46.2%
Hindu	4%	1.7%
Muslim	8%	6.5%
None	29%	37.2%
Other	4%	0.6%
Prefer Not To Say	6%	6.0%
Sikh	1%	0.9%
Jewish	0%	0.5%

Region

	Region 2023-24	Comparison with National Data
Wales	3%	5%
Scotland	6%	8%
England	91%	84%
N.Ireland	0%	3%

Complaints arising from consumers based in Northern Ireland have been low in number (7) during 2023-24 which statistically results in a '0%'.

Appendix 5: Feedback

	2023-24
	Client feedback
Response rate %	14%
/10	
How well did we understand your concerns	8.8/10
How satisfied were you with the outcome	7.6/10
How satisfied were you with the process	7.6/10
Easy to contact OCCS	9.4/10
How would you rate your overall experience	8.7/10
%	
Would recommend OCCS to others	87%
Would use OCCS again	86%
Would use ADR again	86%
Consider OCCS to be:	
Fair	67%
Helpful & efficient	90%
Productive	76%