

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman – Consultation on Draft Service Charter

1) Does the draft service charter give you a clear sense of what you can expect from our service?

The Optical Confederation represents the 12,000 optometrists, 6,000 dispensing opticians, 7,000 optical businesses and 45,000 ancillary staff in the UK, who provide high quality and accessible eye care services to the whole population. The Confederation is a coalition of the five optical representative bodies: the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO), the Association of Contact Lens Manufacturers (ACLM), the Association of Optometrists (AOP), the Federation of Manufacturing Opticians (FMO) and the Federation of Opticians (FODO). As a Confederation we work with others to improve eye health for the public good.

The Optical Confederation welcomes the draft service charter, which provides a clear, simple guide to the roles and requirements of complainants, organisations complained about and the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. The optical sector itself has robust investigation and resolution processes at organisational, local/regional and national levels as well as through our regulator and a dedicated sector consumer complaints service. We are therefore pleased that the draft charter makes clear that the Ombudsman will only investigate complaints once these processes have been completed. This has not always been our experience in the past and it is pleasing to see this principle reiterated.

We are concerned, however, that the charter is overly ambitious and may be difficult to fully implement, particularly regarding the promise of full transparency throughout the investigation process. The phrase ‘we will do our best to meet our promises’ acknowledges the challenges of implementation but does not inspire confidence in the service. We suggest the Ombudsman

should limit promises to what can and will be fulfilled, and address aspirations separately, even if this means a more circumscribed charter.

Of greater concern is the commitment to sharing of facts and emerging views during an ongoing investigation. In our opinion this could mislead complainants and those complained against because facts and views will change as new evidence is considered until the investigation has been completed. It would be helpful to give further information about how and when it is proposed information and learning will be shared during and after an investigation.

We note and support the commitment to widely sharing learning from investigations. However it will be important that this is done in a way that is non-punitive and respects organisations' need for confidentiality, particularly where no case to answer is found. We suggest that learning should be anonymised, unless both parties agree otherwise or the information is already in the public domain.

2) On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the most satisfied), how satisfied are you with the draft content in the service charter?

N/A

3) Is the draft service charter easy to understand? (strongly disagree, disagree, neither, agree, strongly agree)

Agree

4) Do you think this charter is fit for purpose? (strongly disagree, disagree, neither, agree, strongly agree)

Neither

5) Does this charter cover everything you would want to know? (strongly disagree, disagree, neither, agree, strongly agree)

Agree

6) Do you feel the draft charter has sufficiently covered all areas? (Y/N)

No - It would be helpful to give further information about how and when it is proposed information and learning will be shared during and after an investigation.

7) How would you like us to communicate how we are delivering our promises outlined in the service charter?

We are content with the current plan to publish updates on the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's website.

8) About you: (Please choose one. If more than one applies, please choose the most current

I am an advocacy or interest group representative (pre-formatted option)

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