



How study can count towards CPD



Formal study can help you meet your CPD requirements

In the September 2025 issue of *Dispensing Optics*, we explored how General Optical Council (GOC) registrants could organise and undertake peer review and add this to their continuing professional development (CPD) portfolio as self-directed learning. In this article, we will look at how undertaking formal study could support completion of the GOC CPD scheme requirements.

In the current 2025-2027 CPD scheme, all GOC registrants are able to submit evidence to show that they have undertaken some form of self-directed learning¹. Across the cycle, a minimum of 18 CPD points must come from provider-led CPD, i.e. CPD that has already been submitted to the GOC by an approved CPD provider, or a probationary CPD provided where it has been approved by the GOC.

This would, for example, include any CPD undertaken with ABDO. It is then possible for registrants to obtain the

remainder of their minimum CPD points requirement by submitting learning that has not been conducted via a CPD provider session, and this would be classed as 'self-directed learning'.

ACADEMIC PROGRESSION

One form of self-directed learning, which can be submitted to the GOC, is that undertaken as part of an academic or vocational qualification. There are many avenues available to dispensing opticians (DOs) looking to advance their career by undertaking further formal qualifications. One common route is to obtain the ABDO Diploma in Contact Lens Practice (previously Certificate), which is a GOC-registerable contact lens qualification enabling practise as a contact lens optician (CLO). A qualification is only registerable with the GOC if it is required in legislation, such as in the Opticians Act.

ABDO also provides a range of non-GOC-registered qualifications in the areas

of management and leadership, extended services for CLOs, paediatric eyecare and low vision. There are additional qualifications available to DOs elsewhere in the sector, including postgraduate offerings from some optometry-school universities.

Where any postgraduate course is provided within the eyecare sector, it is possible that it may already have GOC-approved CPD available by completing parts of the course. This may be possible if the education provider is also a GOC-approved CPD provider and the course content is applicable to be CPD accredited. An example of this would be the ABDO Professional Certificate in Paediatric Eyecare where the online course has been CPD accredited.

Where GOC-approved CPD has not been pre-applied to a formal qualification, it is possible for any GOC registrant undertaking the course to consider if it is possible to submit to the GOC CPD scheme as self-directed learning, with the next step being to consider its suitability.

IDENTIFYING SUITABLE LEARNING

So, what makes formal learning suitable to be submitted to the GOC CPD scheme? To answer this question, there is a need to understand the purpose of the CPD scheme and how it is underpinned, and the best place to find that is at the GOC: *"Professional development is crucial to ensure that all regulated healthcare professions, including optometrists and dispensing opticians, continue to practise safely throughout the duration of their professional career. As a GOC registrant, you have a responsibility to ensure that you maintain and develop your skills, knowledge and conduct to help improve the safety and quality of care that your patients and the public receive"*¹.

What we can see from this quote is that safe practise and keeping up-to-date are key elements of the GOC CPD scheme. The scheme is then underpinned by the Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians².

This means that when considering if some formal learning is suitable to submit as self-directed CPD, there is a need to check both of these areas can be ticked: is the learning relevant to safe and up-to-date practise in your registrable profession with the GOC; and is it possible to relate the learning to the GOC Standards of Practice. It is likely that if the answer is yes to one of these, it is to both of them as the

standards are there to help us be safe and relevant practitioners.

There are a few questions that can be asked to help check the learning is suitable. Firstly, is the learning relevant to your registrable profession with the GOC? The CPD scheme is designed to ensure you are safe and up-to-date in your *current profession*.

If you are DO and are training to become a CLO or an optometrist, some of the content you are studying could be considered relevant to the profession of dispensing, e.g. learning in the area of patient communication or acute eye conditions. However, other elements may be considered out-of-scope for DOs, for example, designing rigid gas permeable lens parameters or using Volk lenses to look at the retina.

When you submit self-directed learning to the GOC you need to provide a short, written reflection statement explaining why the learning you have undertaken is relevant to your scope of practice, so you need to clearly understand if it is relevant to your current registered profession or not.

The second area to consider is if, and how, the learning fits into the GOC Standards of Practice. In the previous self-directed learning article, we introduced the GOC CPD core learning domains:

- Professionalism
- Communication
- Clinical practice
- Leadership and accountability

Additionally, there are two specialty domains:

- Specialty CPD: contact lens optician (CLO)
- Specialty CPD: AS/SP/IP optometrist

The GOC Standards of Practice have been divided into the first four core learning domains, which can be found in the appendix of the GOC booklet – CPD: A Guide for Registrants¹.

By looking at this guide and, for more detail, at the Standards of Practice on the GOC website, it is possible to identify if the learning undertaken sits under one or more of these learning domains or not. It is only possible to choose a maximum of two learning domains per CPD submission, though one or both specialty domains can be added if it is relevant to do so.

As primary care continues to evolve, we see healthcare professionals across the UK undertaking new practices. However,

there is always a need to identify if any new skills and practices sit within your current profession's scope of practice and are regulated by the GOC.

An example of where a GOC registrant may undertake a formal course or training, but where it would not be suitable to submit as self-directed learning under the GOC CPD scheme as it is not in practice regulated by the GOC, would be where the

to your scope of practice and how it fits into the GOC standards of practice

- **Provide evidence of attendance if relevant** – for example, if you attended a lecture as part of your study you may have an agenda or email which shows this. If you conducted the study on your own, your written reflection statement should identify this and be sufficient



Interactive study includes workshops and lectures

skills/practice is being conducted on a different area of the body to the eyes, e.g. the ears. There would be a need to check if this practice is regulated elsewhere, as well to check if your current professional indemnity insurance covered you in this new area.

SIMPLE PROCESS TO FOLLOW

Once you are happy that your formal study is suitable to submit as self-directed CPD there is a simple process to follow¹:

- **Identify how long the study took.** if less than one hour but more than 30 minutes you can claim for 0.5 CPD points. If one hour or more, you can claim for one CPD point
- **Consider if the study was interactive.** To do this, it must tick the criteria for interactive CPD set out by the GOC and involve one of the following: physical attendance with others, e.g. a lecture or workshop; or distance learning that includes an element of interaction with others, i.e. meaningful engagement with your peers using electronic or verbal communication, either instantaneous such as in a chat room, or non-instantaneous such as a message board or email chain
- **Write your short reflection statement** – explaining why the learning is relevant

IN SUMMARY

Submitting self-directed CPD may seem daunting, but the process is simple to follow on the MyGOC platform. Adding self-directed learning into the CPD mix can also support the creation of meaningful professional development plans – as it allows you to reflect your career aspirations as part of your life-long learning plans.

If you have any queries about self-directed learning or other aspects of CPD, don't hesitate to reach out to the ABDO professional development team at abdochcpd@abdo.org.uk

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References

1. General Optical Council. Continuing Professional Development (CPD). A Guide for Registrants. 2025. Available at: <https://optical.org/resource/cpd-a-guide-for-registrants-january.html>
2. General Optical Council. Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians. Available at: <https://optical.org/standards-and-guidance/standards/standards-of-practice-for-optometrists-and-dispens.html>