

## **Optometrists' Futures 2018**

**A survey report of recruitment, retention and career aspirations of the optometric workforce, for the Association of Optometrists**

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# Institute for Employment Studies

IES is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in public employment policy and HR management. It works closely with employers in all sectors, government departments, agencies, professional bodies and associations. IES is a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets, people management, and HR planning and development. IES is a not-for-profit organisation.

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# Executive Summary

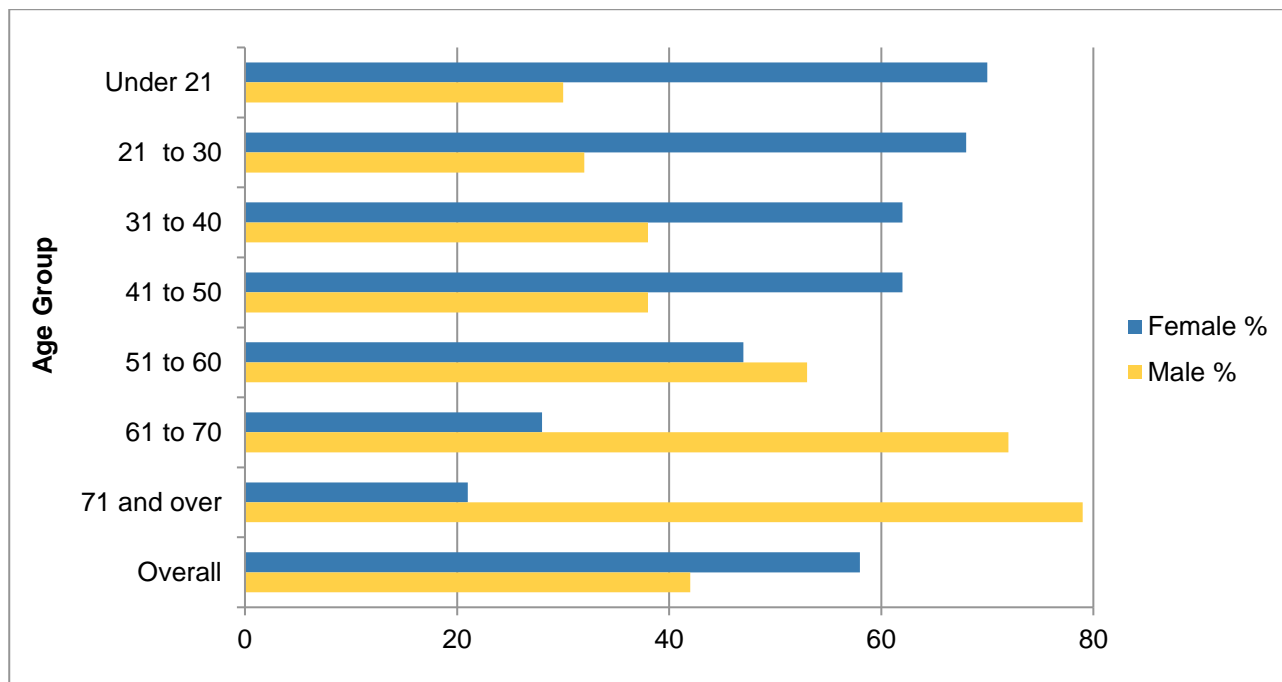
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## The survey

The Association of Optometrists (AOP) survey took place during April and May 2018, and attracted a response from 2,357 students, pre-registration optometrists and GOC-registered optometrists. Most (2,316) are AOP members although 46 non-members also responded. From July to September 2018 follow-up interviews were held with 17 individuals who had volunteered to take part, in order to add some qualitative material to illustrate the quantitative survey findings.

## Biographical profile

- The gender breakdown of respondents is 58 per cent female, 42 per cent male.
  - For student respondents it is 68 per cent female, 32 per cent male; a noticeably higher percentage of women than in the sample overall.
  - However for pre-registration optometrists it is similar to the overall sample: 59 per cent female, 41 per cent male.
  - For GOC-registered optometrists, it is 56 per cent female, 44 per cent male.
- The overall average (mean) age of respondents is 40, with ages ranging from 17 to 85.
  - The average age of students is 21.8, of pre-registration optometrists 23.6, and of GOC-registered optometrists 43.2.
- An analysis by age and gender shows very clearly that the percentage of people choosing to become optometrists who are women has increased notably (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Gender breakdown within age group**

- The ethnic breakdown overall is White 65 per cent, Asian/Asian British 28 per cent, other minority ethnic groups four per cent; the remaining three per cent preferred not to say.
  - For students, the ethnicity breakdown is noticeably different from the overall breakdown, with a much higher percentage of non-White individuals: Asian/Asian British 45 per cent, White 43 per cent.
  - A similar picture is seen among pre-registration optometrists: Asian/Asian British 44 per cent, White 40 per cent.
  - Among GOC-registered optometrists, however, the percentages are White 68 per cent, Asian/Asian British 25 per cent.
- Thirty-seven per cent of respondents overall have caring responsibilities for a child or children; nine per cent have caring responsibilities for one or more adults; and three per cent have both forms of caring responsibility.
- The top two reasons given by both students and pre-registration optometrists for choosing their university is firstly reputation and secondly its location – close to home.

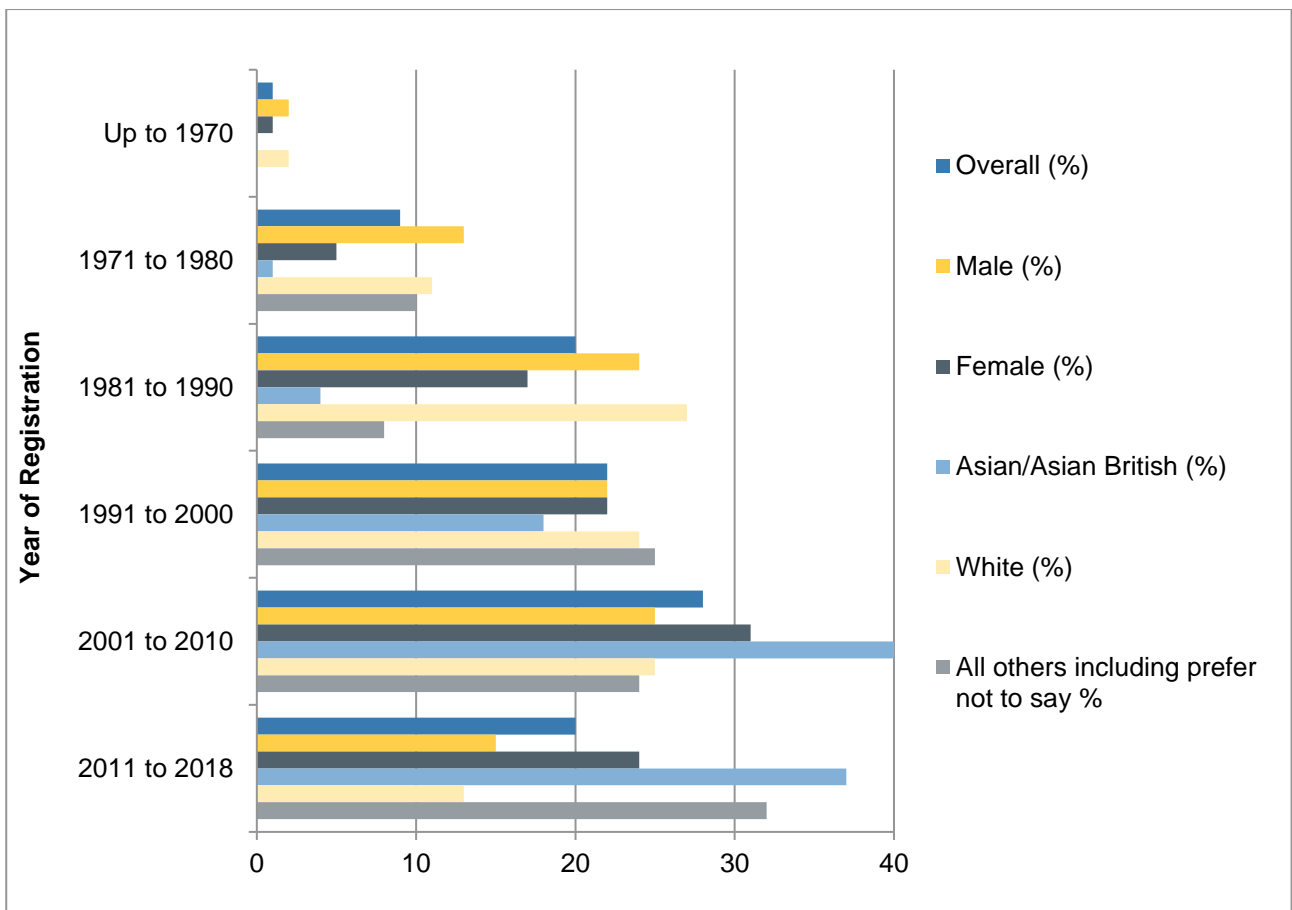
## Working as an optometrist

- Students and pre-registration optometrists chose two main reasons for opting for a career in optometry: wanting to work in healthcare, and wanting to help people.
- When asked what they would look for when choosing a pre-registration position, the top four aspects chosen by students are: good support provided, offers good optometry training and development, reputation and location – close to home. Pre-registration optometrists have a slightly different list when asked what they looked for: location –

close to home, good support provided, offers good optometry training and development, and location – easy commute.

- GOC-registered respondents gave years of registering with the GOC ranging from 1954 to 2018, with 90 per cent having registered from 1981 onwards.
  - The majority (60%) of men registered with the GOC before 2001, while the majority of women (55%) registered from 2001 onwards (see Figure 2).
  - The optometry profession appears to have been attracting Asian/Asian British men and women mainly from the 1990s onwards. Figure 2 also shows that only five per cent of Asian/Asian British respondents registered up to 1990, compared to 40 per cent of White respondents, whereas from 2001 77 per cent of Asian/Asian British respondents registered, compared to a much lower 38 per cent of White respondents.

**Figure 2: GOC-registered optometrists by year of registration**



- A fairly large minority (27%) of GOC-registered respondents work solely as locums, giving the main three reasons for doing so as flexibility, financial reward and variety of work. Men and women appear equally likely to opt for locum work only; however, there is a notable difference by ethnicity, with 38 per cent of Asian/Asian British respondents choosing locum work compared to 23 per cent of White respondents. Locum working is also particularly likely in the 61 and over age group, with some respondents saying it is because they are semi-retired or easing towards retirement.

- The large majority of GOC-registered respondents (83%) have only one paid or income-generating position. However, 13 per cent have two positions, two per cent have three positions, and just under two per cent have more than three.
  - Men are slightly more likely than women to have more than one position, although the reason for this is mainly due to age: those aged 51 and over are notably more likely to have more than one position.
- When asked about their first or only position, it is apparent that the following four types of organisation account for 95 per cent of respondents: large corporate chain (35%), independent business (28%), small chain (21%) and hospital eye service (11%).
  - Six per cent of respondents indicate their position 1 workplace is in Northern Ireland, 11 per cent in Scotland and seven per cent in Wales. The large majority (77%) are based in England.
  - When asked to select all the aspects that had attracted the respondent to this position, the top four are: I like the values (46%), location – close to home (40%), reputation (39%) and the culture feels comfortable (37%).
  - An analysis of working patterns (days and times) indicates that weekday mornings and afternoons, together with Saturday mornings, are very common times for optometrists to work in their first or only position. However, some optometrists work on Saturday afternoons, Sundays and weekday evenings.
- The relatively small number of respondents who have a second position indicate that it is most likely to be in the hospital eye service (30%), a large corporate chain (14%) or an independent business (14%). Asian/Asian British respondents are more likely to say their second position is with a larger corporate chain than for any other type of organisation, while White respondents are more likely to work for the hospital eye service.
  - Three per cent of respondents indicate their position 2 workplace is in Northern Ireland, eight per cent in Scotland and 7.5 per cent in Wales. The large majority (82%) of second positions are in England.
  - When asked what had attracted the respondent to this position, the main reasons were: I like the values (46%), opportunity to specialise in area(s) of interest (37%), reputation (35%) and the culture feels comfortable (35%).
- The working pattern again indicates that weekday mornings and afternoons are the most likely, although Saturday working is also fairly frequent; again, Tuesday is the most likely day for the respondent to be working.
- In addition to their main paid/income-generating position(s), some carry out additional work: 19 per cent do locum work; 12 per cent do advisory work for an optical body such as the GOC, AOP, LOCSU, the NHS or a university; and six per cent do unpaid work for a charity.
- A pay analysis, carried out using the income data for respondents who work 30 or more hours a week across their three positions, indicates that overall, the hourly pay/income rate of those respondents included in the analysis is £25.42.



- Broken down by gender, the hourly rate is: males £29.44, females £25.91.
- Comparing Asian/Asian British respondents with White respondents, the hourly rate by ethnicity is: Asian/Asian British £24.37, White £25.91.
- Broken down by age, the hourly rate is: aged 21 to 30 £20.30, aged 31 to 40 £23.79, aged 41 to 50 £30.57 and aged 51 to 60 £29.52.
- A regression analysis showed that:
  - Using 21 to 30 year olds as a benchmark: holding all else constant, on average 31 to 40 year olds earn 13.7 per cent more per hour, 41 to 50 year olds earn 27.4 per cent more per hour, and 51 to 60 year olds earn 25.5 per cent more per hour.
  - On average women earn 15.5 per cent less per hour than men, holding all else constant.
  - Using the East of England as the reference category: holding all else constant, those in Northern Ireland earn 28.4 per cent less per hour, those in Scotland and the North East earn 15.7 per cent less per hour, those in the South East earn 12.9 per cent less per hour and those in the West Midlands earn 18.7 per cent less per hour.
- Adding willingness to move around the UK (for an ideal job) to the regression model showed that this did not have a significant impact on earnings.

## Career aspirations

- When asked about aspirations to manage their own business at some point in the future, unsurprisingly many pre-registration optometrists are unsure (36%), although 16 per cent answered with a clear 'no', while 34 per cent would like to manage their own business 'as an independent business owner' and a further 13 per cent 'as a joint venture partner/franchisee'.
- When GOC-registered optometrists without current staffing responsibilities were asked about their aspirations to manage your own business at some point in the future, 74 per cent say they have no such aspirations. However, 16 per cent would like to manage their own business 'as an independent business owner', a further seven per cent 'as a joint venture partner/franchisee', and a further two per cent 'as an employed manager'.
- A regression analysis designed to find out if there is a 'typical' optometrist with aspirations to own/manage a business showed that, holding all else equal:
  - Those aged 21 to 30 are 4.5 times more likely to aspire to own/manage a business compared to those aged 41 to 50, and those aged 31 to 40 are 1.9 times more likely than those aged 41 to 50.
  - Men are 2.8 times more likely to aspire to manage their own business than women.
  - Those who describe their ethnicity as Asian/Asian British are 1.7 times more likely to aspire to manage their own business than White individuals.
- When GOC-registered optometrists were asked about their aspirations in specific clinical and professional areas, the three top areas, chosen by half or more of

respondents, are the management of specific conditions such as glaucoma and medical retina (68%), extended primary care services (62%), and advanced diagnostics such as OCT and Optomap (58%).

- Within the next five years, the majority of GOC-registered respondents (63%) plan to continue with their current optometry position(s). A further 13 per cent plan to change their position(s) but stay living in the same area, five per cent aim to move to another area to work as an optometrist, and two per cent aim to leave the UK to practise in another country. Eleven per cent plan to leave the profession entirely due to retirement, and the remaining six per cent plan to leave the profession entirely due to reasons other than retirement; the main reasons given are to pursue other interests or a different career, to escape from the pressures in the job, and that optometry is no longer fulfilling.

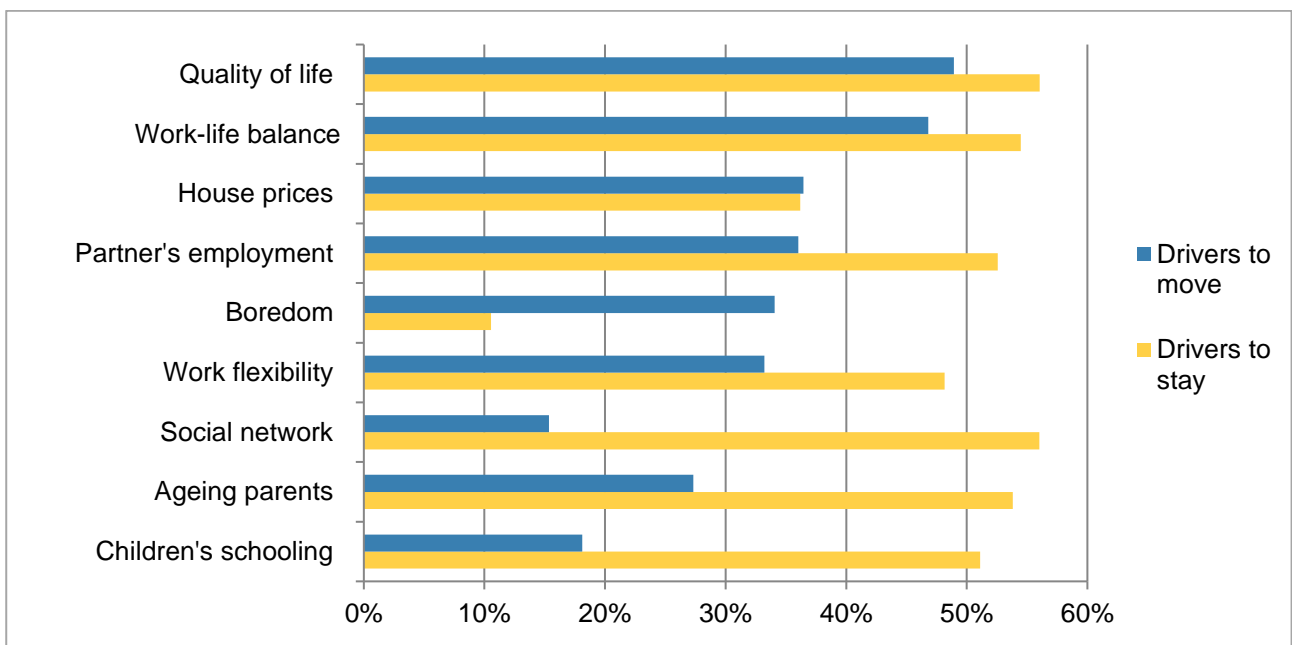
### Are optometrists willing to relocate?

The data gathered via the survey and the interviews suggests that respondents do not have much of an appetite for moving; and a search of published literature on the topic suggests that optometrists are not unique, in that willingness to relocate is generally low in the UK population, and has been decreasing over recent years.

- When asked if they were still living at the same address as when they applied for their course, 44 per cent of students said yes, and a comparison of students' current university and their country of residence before starting their degree indicates that Cardiff is the only university outside England to attract a large percentage of its optometry students from outside the UK country in which it is located.
- Similarly, 30 per cent of pre-registration respondents lived, while studying, at the same address as when they applied for their course; and again, Cardiff seems different from the other universities offering an optometry degree in terms of the students it attracts from outside Wales.
- Although the majority of pre-registration optometrists (61%) would be prepared to move to another location in the UK for an ideal new position, already at this early career stage, 33 per cent would prefer to stay in their current location, while six per cent are not able to move.
  - For those prepared to move, there is a reasonable degree of flexibility over the type of area where respondents are willing to live – although there is a clear preference for urban living and good transport links to the rest of the UK.
  - However, when asked specifically about country of the UK and region within country, it is clear that some regions are more favoured than others: in England, there is a preference for the West Midlands, London, the South West and the North West, with the East of England the least preferred. In the other three UK countries, the more populated areas are favoured: Belfast in Northern Ireland, Central region in Scotland and the South East and South West in Wales.

- When GOC-registered respondents are asked if they would be prepared to move to another area of the UK for an ideal job, a relatively small percentage (17%) said yes, while 56 per cent prefer to stay where they are and 28 per cent are unable to move.
  - Although some respondents express a willingness to move ‘anywhere’ within a particular UK country, others have preferences about the areas they would or would not move to: in England, London and the South West are more favoured, while the East of England, the North East and the East Midlands are much less so; in Northern Ireland, Belfast is notably more favoured; in Scotland, there is a clear preference for the Central region, with the “remote” areas attracting a low response; and in Wales, the two areas in the South are preferred.
  - GOC-registered respondents identified a variety of non-work drivers to move from, or stay in, their current geographical area. An imbalance is apparent, in that the drivers to stay put appear to be much stronger (see Figure 3):
    - The six drivers to move identified by more than one-third of respondents are quality of life, work-life balance, house prices, partner’s employment, boredom, and work flexibility. No driver has been identified by half or more respondents.
    - By contrast, no less than 17 drivers to stay are identified by one-third or more respondents, six of these by over 50 per cent of respondents: social network, quality of life, work-life balance, ageing parents, partner’s employment, and children’s schooling.

**Figure 3: GOC-registered respondents: strongest drivers to stay in or move from current location**



- To find out the characteristics of optometrists who are willing and able to move, a regression analysis was run. The results show that, holding all else constant:
  - Compared to those aged 41 to 50, those aged 51 to 60 are 2.5 times less likely to be willing to move, those who are aged 61 to 70 are 7 times less likely to be willing

to move, but those who are aged 21 to 30 are 1.6 times more likely to be willing to move.

- Those with children are 2.6 times less likely to move than those without.
- The only significant geographical variation is that those currently based in Northern Ireland are notably more likely to be willing to move than average.

## Recruitment and retention

Of the GOC-registered respondents, 27 per cent have staffing responsibilities. Most of these (74%) are independent business owners, the rest being joint venture partners/franchisees or employed public, private or charity sector managers.

- Overall, 23 per cent reported they had vacancies, with the average numbers being 1.65 (mean) and one (mode).
  - Vacancy reporting is higher in England and Wales (27%) than Northern Ireland and Scotland (11%), and within England it is notably higher than average in East of England (42%) and the South East (42%); it is also high in rural areas (47%).
  - Vacancies are covered mostly by using locums (53% of respondents use these) and/or seeing fewer clients (47%).
- Only ten per cent of business owners/managers find it easy to recruit newly-qualified optometrists compared to 42 per cent who find it difficult.
  - More than half of business owners/managers in the South West (68%), South East (62%), East of England (57%), Wales (53%), Yorkshire and the Humber (53%) and East Midlands (52%) find it difficult, compared to only 12 per cent in Northern Ireland and 22 per cent in Scotland.
  - Particular difficulties are apparent in a predominantly rural area (69%), a geographically remote area (63%) and an area requiring a car for transport (51%), compared to in a densely populated area such as a city (22%).
- Once optometrists are recruited, however, it appears relatively easy to retain them; only 13 per cent report that it is difficult, compared to 40 per cent who find it easy.
  - In the East of England region, a higher than average percentage of business owners/managers reported it was difficult (23%). It is also harder than average in rural locations, with 24 per cent finding it difficult.
  - The region where the highest number find it easy or very easy is the West Midlands (58%).

## Optometrists with attitude

Respondents express very clear positive views about many aspects of their work and their profession, but they also have concerns. Figure 4 shows the top six positive statements and the four greatest concerns.

- When asked to identify the best thing about being an optometrist, and one thing that would improve the profession, the free text responses given are very similar to the positives and concerns identified in Figure 4:
  - The overwhelming top answer is being able to help people, followed by the flexibility of being an optometrist, engaging with people, and having job satisfaction.
  - The main suggestions for improvement are to increase pay and earnings, to decrease commercial and sales pressures, and to rectify the public’s erroneous perception of optometry (which leads them to undervalue optometrists).

**Figure 4: Attitudes about optometry: top positives and greatest concerns**



- When asked whether they would still choose optometry if they could start their career again, 48 per cent say yes, 26 per cent no, and 26 per cent are unsure.
- The follow-up interviews conducted with a small number of people yielded views that were in line with the survey data:
  - Almost all interviewees are happy with their choice of optometry, saying that it is a sociable job involving interactions with the public; it is fulfilling in that optometrists provide care and help people; and that it is an interesting profession, which enables them to use scientific skills and work with high tech equipment.
  - Most do not plan to move jobs or change their career in any major way, although the pre-registration interviewees have aspirations to manage their own business in the future.

- Interviewees who are business owners/managers report recruitment difficulties, especially in the East of England and South East; however, retention is less of a problem because of the efforts they make to look after their staff by giving them a good working environment with a variety of work, and encouraging professional and personal development.
- Most of the GOC-registered interviewees wanted to stay in their current geographical area, while the students and pre-registration interviewees would move if necessary but with a degree of reluctance.
- Challenges facing the profession are perceived to be the increasing presence of corporate chains and the low NHS sight test fees, which are seen as contributing towards the devaluing of the profession and lack of understanding about optometry among the general public.
- However, the majority of GOC-registered interviewees would still encourage others to become optometrists, albeit with some caveats.

# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Background

The Association of Optometrists (AOP) commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies (IES), an independent, not-for-profit research and consultancy institute, to carry out an online survey of the optometry profession. The large majority (around 82%) of optometrists is in membership of the AOP, which provides insurance and legal protection as well as advice, support and representation. Members include optometrists who are responsible for staffing decisions (as independent business owners, joint venture partners, franchisees, or paid managers in the private, public or third sectors); employed optometrists in the private, public or third sectors; self-employed optometrists who work solely as locums; pre-registration optometrists; and students of optometry.

The main focus of the survey was to explore the career aspirations of optometrists in the UK, including:

- the factors that influence optometrists' decisions about their career moves
- the extent to which optometrists are able and/or willing to move to another geographical area of the UK for career advancement
- the extent of locum working among optometrists, in particular the reasons why increasing numbers of optometrists choose to work solely as locums<sup>1</sup>
- any problems that employers may be experiencing in recruiting and retaining employees, including whether and why they use locums
- the tools and techniques that employers are using to tackle recruitment and retention difficulties, and their views on how successful these are.

In addition, the survey tested optometrists' attitudes towards their work and their profession. Questions were also asked about respondents' personal circumstances and current situations, to enable further insights via the analysis and reporting of the survey data.

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<sup>1</sup> The 2015 Optical Workforce Survey (OWS) found that 17.5% of optometrists who responded worked primarily as locums; a substantial increase from 10.5% in the 2010 OWS: <https://www.college-optometrists.org/the-college/research/research-projects/optical-workforce-survey2.html>



## 1.2 The survey

### 1.2.1 Process

The questions for the survey were designed by the IES research team in conjunction with the AOP project manager, and also taking into account the views of the AOP's Policy Committee and Council (through attendance and discussions at these meetings), student representatives (by holding a short focus group), and two of the three big corporate employers (via telephone conversations).

Two separate questionnaires were created. One was aimed at AOP members and distributed via personal email invitations, with three reminders issued at intervals to non-respondents. An incentive, in the shape of a retail shopping voucher, was offered to one randomly-selected respondent who submitted a completed questionnaire; this random selection was made by a member of the IES research team after the survey had closed. The second survey was aimed at non-AOP members, and was available via clicking on a link that was widely publicised by the AOP (using its own communication channels including social media) and within the large corporate companies, some of whose staff choose to be covered only by their employer's insurance.

The surveys were launched on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2018 and closed on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2018 at the start of the working day.

### 1.2.2 Response

In total 13,821 AOP members were sent an email invitation asking them to complete the survey. Just 13 of these email invitations 'bounced', giving a total of 13,808 possible respondents. In addition, 26 people chose to opt out of the survey, reducing the possible total to 13,782. A total of 2,283 people responded, of which 121 were partial responses (i.e. the individuals did not finish the survey by clicking on the 'submit' button at the end). However, 33 optometrists who said they were AOP members responded to the non-member survey. The overall member response was therefore 2,316, giving a response rate of 16.8 per cent. A more detailed response analysis by gender, type of optometrist and age group showed that, compared to the AOP's membership, women were over-represented and men were under-represented: 20 per cent of the female members of the AOP responded, compared to only 12 per cent of male AOP members. The research team therefore recommended that the data should be weighted to correct this imbalance.

The non-member survey yielded a response of only 79, of which four were partial responses. As indicated above, 33 of the 79 indicated that they were AOP members, so were expected to complete the member survey to which members were invited to respond via an email. It is possible that these members either did not receive or did not notice their invitation, or found it easier to respond to the non-member survey.



### 1.2.3 Analysis

Two sets of headline results – one using the member survey data set and the second using the much smaller non-member data set – were produced and sent to the AOP approximately one week after the surveys had closed. These headline results were the basis of a short presentation by members of IES’s research team to the AOP’s Council on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2018; Council members then discussed the further analysis they would like the research team to carry out.

The two data sets were then combined before being weighted to correct for the gender imbalance; a detailed, in-depth analysis then took place using the statistical package SPSS. Unless stated, the analysis in this report uses the weighted data set.

## 1.3 Follow-up interviews

In order to add some qualitative illustrative detail to the mainly quantitative survey analysis, members of the research team conducted 17 telephone interviews with individuals who had volunteered to take part in a follow-up discussion. The interview sample was made up of two students, three pre-registration optometrists, two optometrists who work solely as locums, five employed optometrists and five optometrists with staffing responsibilities (e.g. recruitment and promotion decisions). The latter were either business owners, joint venture partners/franchisees, or employed managers. The interview questions, which were somewhat different depending on the type of optometrist, were agreed with the AOP. The interviews took place in July, August and September 2018.

## 1.4 This report

Following this introductory chapter, the report contains the following sections:

- Chapter 2: Biographical profile
- Chapter 3: Job profile
- Chapter 4: Career intentions and aspirations
- Chapter 5: Geographical mobility
- Chapter 6: Recruitment and retention: the perspective of managers and business owners
- Chapter 7: Optometrists’ attitudes
- Chapter 8: Follow-up interviews
- Chapter 9: Conclusions

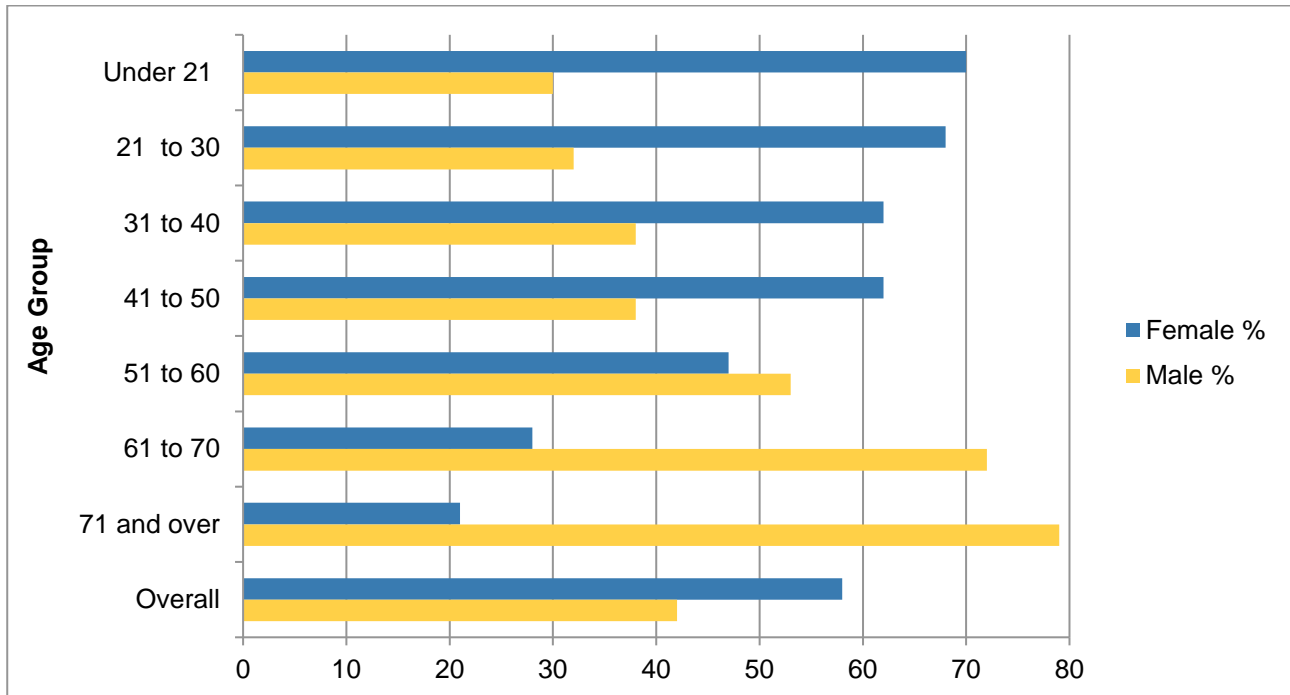
## 2 Biographical profile

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### 2.1 Overall

- The gender breakdown of respondents (unweighted) is 68 per cent female, 31 per cent male, and one per cent either 'other' or 'prefer not to say'. The weighted data adjusts these percentages to 58 per cent female, 42 per cent male.
- The overall average (mean) age of respondents is 40, with ages ranging from 17 to 85. The age breakdown is:
  - Under 21                      7%
  - 21 to 30                      23%
  - 31 to 40                      25%
  - 41 to 50                      19%
  - 51 to 60                      18%
  - Over 60                      8%
- An analysis by age and gender shows very clearly that the percentage of people choosing to become optometrists who are women has increased notably. Among respondents who gave their age, 58 per cent overall are female; however, 69 per cent aged 30 and under and 62 per cent of those aged 31 to 50 are female, compared to 47 per cent of those aged 51 to 60 and 27 per cent of those aged 61 and over (see Figure 2.1).

**Figure 2.1: Gender breakdown within age group**



■ The ethnic breakdown is given below. As the large majority of respondents fall into two ethnic groups (Asian/Asian British and White), and the remaining minority ethnic respondents are very varied in their ethnicity, the majority of comparisons using ethnicity breakdowns are presented in this report using these two groups only. In addition, a new variable has been created to enable comparisons between Asian/Asian British females, Asian/Asian British males, White females and White males.

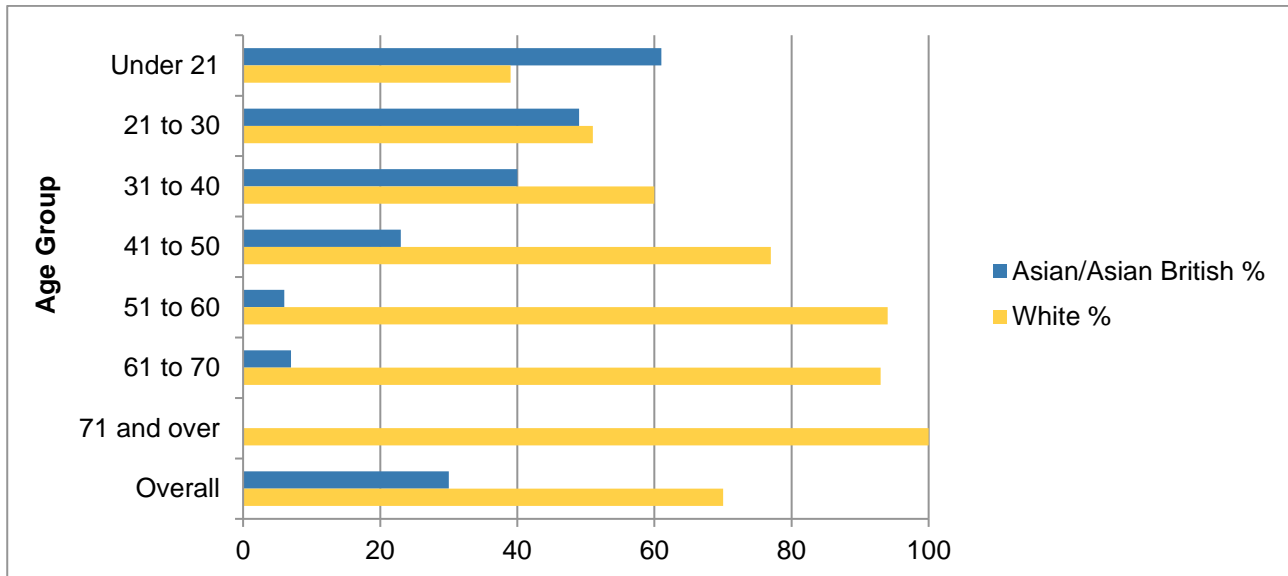
- White 65%
- Asian/Asian British 28%
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British 1%
- Mixed 1%
- Other 2%
- Prefer not to say 3%
- 'Other' responses given by five or more people are Chinese (14 responses), Arab (8) and Middle Eastern (7).

■ Figure 2.2 shows, using only the two main ethnic categories of respondents, that the percentage of people choosing to become optometrists who are of Asian/Asian British ethnicity has increased notably. Overall, of respondents in these two categories, 30 per cent are Asian/Asian British and 70 per cent White; however, among those aged up to 30 the percentage of Asian/Asian British is 52 per cent, while among those aged over 40 it is 21 per cent.

- Looking at the ethnicity information another way: 47 per cent of all Asian/Asian British respondents are aged 30 and under, compared to 19 per cent of all White

respondents; and 21 per cent of Asian/Asian British respondents are aged over 40, compared to 60 per cent of White respondents.

**Figure 2.2: Ethnicity breakdown of Asian/Asian British and White respondents**



- Thirty-seven per cent of respondents have caring responsibilities for a child or children; nine per cent have caring responsibilities for one or more adults; and three per cent have both forms of caring responsibility.
  - The average (mean) age of those with no caring responsibilities is 38.4, compared to 42.3 for those caring for one or more children, 48.5 for those caring for one or more adults, and 44.8 for those for both forms of caring responsibility.
  - Of those with caring responsibilities for one or more children, 60 per cent are female.
  - Of those with caring responsibilities for one or more adults, 54 per cent are female.
  - However, of those with both forms of caring responsibility, the percentages are equal at 50 per cent for both male and female respondents.
  - An analysis by ethnicity indicates that of those with caring responsibilities for one or more children, 66 per cent are White (while 29% are Asian/Asian British); of those with caring responsibilities for one or more adults, 58 per cent are White (while 31% are Asian/Asian British); and of those with both forms of caring responsibility, 46 per cent are White (while 42% are Asian/Asian British). The higher levels of caring responsibilities among White respondents is related to their age profile, in that White respondents tend to be older than those of Asian/Asian British ethnicity.
- A small number (1.4%) of respondents have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term effect on their ability to carry out their normal day-to-day activities; 1.2 per cent ticked 'prefer not to say', with the remaining 97.4 per cent saying they have no impairment. Of those who have an impairment:
  - 48 per cent require additional support in the workplace
  - 48 per cent feel their impairment is career-limiting.

## 2.2 Student optometrists

A total of 276 respondents indicated they were students.

- The gender breakdown (weighted) of students is 68 per cent female, 32 per cent male; a noticeably higher percentage of women than in the sample overall.
- The ethnicity breakdown is also noticeably different from the overall breakdown, with a much higher percentage of individuals from minority ethnic groups, notably Asian/Asian British:
  - Asian/Asian British 45%
  - White 43%
  - Black/African/Caribbean/Black British 4%
  - Mixed 2%
  - Other 4%
  - Prefer not to say 2%
- The average (mean) age of students is 21.8; however, ages ranged from 17 to 58. The age breakdown is:
  - Under 21 52%
  - 21 to 30 43%
  - 31 to 40 4%
  - Over 40 1%
- Three per cent have caring responsibilities for a child or children, and three per cent have caring responsibilities for one or more adults.
- Fewer than two per cent have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term effect on their ability to carry out their normal day-to-day activities.
- The percentage breakdown of their universities is as follows:
  - Cardiff 19%
  - City 14%
  - Aston 12%
  - Manchester 11%
  - Bradford 8%
  - Glasgow Caledonian 7%
  - Hertfordshire 6%
  - Plymouth 6%
  - Ulster 6%
  - Anglia Ruskin 5%

- 
- Portsmouth 1%
  - Other 4% (all respondents who ticked 'other' gave a free text response of 'Dublin Institute of Technology' when asked to specify).
- In response to a question asking why they had chosen their university, the following responses were given (note that students could tick more than one reason, and most did so):
- Reputation of the university 59%
  - Location – near home 49%
  - Course content/syllabus 45%
  - Course delivery/teaching style 37%
  - Recommendation of friends or family 32%
  - Location – an area of the UK I wanted to live in 21%
  - Ease of getting a pre-registration position after completing degree 19%
  - Other 9%
- Female and male students differ somewhat in their reasons for choosing their university.
- Male students are more likely to cite 'reputation' than their female counterparts (65% compared to 56%)
  - Female students are more likely than male students to give 'location – near home' as a reason (51% compared to 46%)
  - Male students are more likely to cite both 'course content' (52%) and 'course delivery' (48%) compared to females (42% and 33% respectively).
  - 'Recommendation of friends or family' is also more important to male students (38%) than female students (29%).
- There were fewer differences when the reasons for choosing their university were analysed by ethnicity. However, it is noticeable that three reasons – 'course content', 'course delivery', and 'location – an area of the UK I wanted to live in' – were more important to White students (50%, 40% and 32% respectively) than to Asian/Asian British students (39%, 30% and 10%).
- Almost half of the student respondents (47%) had considered applying for a course other than optometry. An analysis of the free text responses given when asked which course(s) they had considered showed that the most likely courses were medicine (37 students gave this answer), dentistry (24), pharmacy (11), biology/biomedical sciences (11) and physiotherapy (6).
- When asked about their expected year of graduation, the following responses were given:
- 2018 24%
  - 2019 29%

- 2020 35%
- 2021 11%
- 2022 1%

## 2.3 Pre-registration optometrists

A total of 64 respondents indicated they were pre-registration optometrists; the relatively low number means that fewer comparisons can be made than for students.

- The gender breakdown (weighted) of pre-registration respondents is 59 per cent female, 41 per cent male; fairly similar to the sample overall.
- As for students, the ethnicity breakdown is noticeably different from the overall breakdown, with a much higher percentage of individuals from minority ethnic groups:
  - Asian/Asian British 44%
  - White 40%
  - Black/African/Caribbean/Black British 2%
  - Mixed 2%
  - Other 6%
  - Prefer not to say 6%
- The average (mean) age of pre-registration respondents is 23.6; ages ranged from 21 to 55. The age breakdown is:
  - 21 to 30 97%
  - Over 30 3%
- Six per cent have caring responsibilities for a child or children, but no pre-registration respondents have adult caring responsibilities.
- Three per cent have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term effect on their ability to carry out their normal day-to-day activities.
- The percentage breakdown of the universities that the pre-registration respondents had attended is as follows:
  - Cardiff 24%
  - Bradford 20%
  - City 11%
  - Aston 11%
  - Ulster 9%
  - Manchester 8%
  - Anglia Ruskin 7%
  - Glasgow Caledonian 6%
  - Plymouth 3%

- Hertfordshire 1%
- Portsmouth no respondents

■ In response to a question asking why they had chosen their university, the following responses were given (note that pre-registration respondents could tick more than one reason, and most did so). The reasons are fairly similar to those given by students, although 'reputation' is somewhat more important, 'location – near home' somewhat less important, and 'course content' considerably less important, than for students:

- Reputation of the university 64%
- Location – near home 45%
- Location – an area of the UK I wanted to live in 33%
- Course delivery/teaching style 30%
- Recommendation of friends or family 30%
- Course content/syllabus 28%
- Ease of getting a pre-registration position after completing degree 19%
- Other 13%

■ Almost half of the pre-registration respondents (49%) had considered applying for a course other than optometry. An analysis of the free text responses given when asked which course(s) they had considered showed that, as for students, the most likely courses were medicine and dentistry.

■ When asked when they had graduated, almost all (88%) ticked '2017'. However, eight per cent selected 2014, 2015 or 2016, and four per cent either ticked '2018' or 'other'.

## 2.4 GOC-registered optometrists

In total 1,825 respondents identified as a practising GOC-registered optometrist; in addition, 49 said they were GOC-registered optometrists on a career break, 17 said they were GOC-registered optometrists who have left the profession to pursue a different career, and 13 identified as retired.

■ Respondents on a career break, or who had left to pursue another career, or who had retired, were asked if they intended to return to optometry within the next two years. Fifty-nine per cent said 'yes' and were directed to the section of the questionnaire that invited respondents to express their opinions about firstly working as an optometrist and secondly the future of the profession.

■ Those who had left to pursue another career and who did not intend to return to optometry were asked why they had left the profession. The main reasons were that they had left to take up a different role within the optical industry (i.e. not as an optometrist); that they felt there was too much pressure to 'sell' and not enough time to spend with patients; that the job was stressful, with too many demands; and that optometry is an undervalued and underpaid profession.



- Of the 1,825 practising optometrists, the gender breakdown (unweighted) is 66 per cent female, 33 per cent male, and one per cent 'other' or 'prefer not to say'; weighted, the percentages adjust to 56 per cent female, 44 per cent male.
- The ethnicity breakdown is given below. The percentage of White respondents is slightly higher than for the sample as a whole, and the percentage of minority ethnic respondents slightly lower, indicating the impact on the overall survey sample of the high percentages of people with non-White ethnicity among the student and pre-registration populations.
  - White 68%
  - Asian/Asian British 25%
  - Black/African/Caribbean/Black British 1%
  - Mixed 1%
  - Other 2%
  - Prefer not to say 4%
- The average (mean) age of practising GOC-registered optometrists is 43.2; ages ranged from 21 to 85. The age breakdown is:
  - 21 to 30 18%
  - 31 to 40 29%
  - 41 to 50 23%
  - 51 to 60 22%
  - Over 60 9%
- Forty-two per cent have caring responsibilities for a child or children, 11 per cent have caring responsibilities for one or more adults, and six per cent have caring responsibilities for both.
- 1.2 per cent have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term effect on their ability to carry out their normal day-to-day activities.

### 2.4.1 Comparisons with other professions

Table 2.1 and Table 2.2 give gender and age comparisons of optometrists and other professions that might be considered fairly similar, with all data (including that for optometrists) being taken from the Labour Force Survey.

Table 2.1 indicates that optometry has the highest percentage of men (42.2%) of the professions featured, with dentistry coming closest at 41.4 per cent.

Table 2.2 shows that optometry has the second highest percentage aged 30 and under (27.3%), after psychology (34.2%), and the second highest percentage aged over 55 (11.5%) after podiatry (a high 28.5%). Overall, optometry seems to have a fairly even balance over the different age groups in comparison to the other professions.

**Table 2.1: Optometry compared to other professions – gender breakdown**

Gender	Optometrists		Psychologists		Pharmacists		Dentists		Veterinary surgeons		Radiographers		Podiatrists	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	5,349	42.2	4,832	12.7	16,608	30.1	15,333	41.4	7,979	31.5	8,037	29.1	2,590	15.8
Female	7,316	57.8	33,158	87.3	38,590	69.9	21,684	58.6	17,365	68.5	19,592	70.9	13,796	84.2
Total	12,665	100	37,990	100	55,198	100	37,017	100	25,344	100	27,629	100	16,386	100

Note: the comparison figures are weighted to extrapolate to the population.

Source: Labour Force Survey

**Table 2.2: Optometry compared to other professions – age breakdown**

Age group	Optometrists		Psychologists		Pharmacists		Dentists		Veterinary surgeons		Radiographers		Podiatrists	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
21-25	1,378	11.5	5,350	10.1	3,111	8.4	3,111	8.3	1,067	4.2			796	4.8
26-30	1,897	15.8	12,761	24.1	3,649	9.9	3,649	9.8	3,005	11.9	6,715	24.3	1,130	6.9
31-35	2,109	17.6	10,300	19.5	7,169	19.4	7,169	19.2	3,280	12.9	5,119	18.5	1,899	11.6
36-40	1,754	14.6	4,183	7.9	6,303	17.0	6,303	16.9	8,541	33.7	4,444	16.1	1,256	7.7
41-45	1,165	9.7	7,022	13.3	3,191	8.6	3,191	8.6	2,738	10.8	4,722	17.1	2,120	12.9
46-50	1,235	10.3	4,803	9.1	5,106	13.8	5,106	13.7	2,551	10.1	2,019	7.3	3,214	19.6
51-55	1,059	8.8	6,027	11.4	5,191	14.0	5,491	14.7	1,804	7.1	2,433	8.8	1,318	8.0
56-60	898	7.5	1,146	2.2	2,288	6.2	2,288	6.1	584	2.3	1,176	4.3	2,165	13.2
61-65	480	4.0	1,336	2.5	1,009	2.7	1,009	2.7	1,774	7.0	1,001	3.6	2,515	15.3
Total	11,975	100	52,928	100	37,017	100	37,317	100	25,344	100	27,629	100	16,413	100

Note: the comparison figures are weighted to extrapolate to the population.

*Source: Labour Force Survey*

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## 3 Job profile

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the optometry work currently being undertaken by respondents or, in the case of students, the type of pre-registration position they are hoping to secure. Longer-term career intentions and aspirations, and the extent to which optometrists are geographically mobile, are covered in the following two chapters.

### 3.2 Students

#### 3.2.1 Why optometry?

Respondents were presented with a list of reasons for choosing optometry as a career, and were asked to select all the reasons that were relevant to them; on average, each student chose seven reasons. Table 3.1 presents the results, and shows students have a particular desire to work in healthcare and to help people.

**Table 3.1: Students' reasons for choosing optometry**

Reason	Number of respondents	%
I want to work in healthcare	226	85
I want to help people	215	80
The idea of working in optometry really interested me	172	65
It offers good earning/income potential	165	62
It's a fascinating profession	158	59
There is plenty of work available	148	55
I could work anywhere in the UK as an optometrist	139	52
It offers opportunities for flexible working	130	49
I like the idea of working one-to-one with clients	127	48
There are opportunities to work in the private, public or charity sectors	125	47
I'm attracted by the idea of running my own business in the future	109	41
It's a clean profession	101	38
It's a high status profession	100	38
I have family/friends who are optometrists	55	21
Other	6	2

'Other' reasons were very varied, and included wanting to progress career-wise, being challenged, enjoyment, and wanting to make a difference.

Further analysis by gender and ethnicity shows:

■ **Gender:**

- The top two reasons are the same for men and women
- Men rate 'It's a fascinating profession' (68%), 'I like the idea of working one-to-one with clients' (54%), 'It's a clean profession' (46%) and 'I'm attracted by the idea of running my own business in the future' (52%) notably higher than women (55%, 45%, 34% and 35% respectively)
- Women rate 'I want to help people' (84%) and 'The idea of working on optometry really interested me' (67%) notably higher than men (73% and 59% respectively)

■ **Ethnicity:**

- Asian/Asian British respondents rate 'It's a clean profession' (40%) and 'I have family/friends who are optometrists' (28%) notably higher than White respondents (32% and 14% respectively)
- White respondents rate 'There is plenty of work available' (66%), 'It offers good earning/income potential' (71%), 'I like the idea of working one-to-one with clients' (55%), 'There are opportunities to work in the private, public and charity sectors' (52%), 'The idea of working in optometry really interested me' (75%) and 'It's a fascinating profession' (66%) notably higher than Asian/Asian British respondents (42%, 58%, 37%, 40%, 59% and 53% respectively)

■ **A deeper level of analysis comparing Asian/Asian British men, Asian/Asian British women, White men and White women provides some further insights:**

- White males are likely to rate certain aspects notably more highly than White females, Asian/Asian British males and Asian/Asian British females: 'It's a fascinating profession' (82%), 'It offers good earning/income potential' (78%), 'There is plenty of work available' (74%), 'I like the idea of working one-to-one with clients' (74%), 'I'm attracted by the idea of running my own business' (56%) and 'It's a clean profession' (48%).
- Asian/Asian British women are particularly likely to cite 'I want to work in healthcare' (91%), and White women are likely to rate 'There are opportunities to work in the private, public or charity sectors' more highly than average (54%). Asian/Asian British men rate two aspects notably lower than average: 'I want to help people' (63%) and 'The idea of working in optometry really interested me' (44%).

### 3.2.2 Choosing a pre-registration position

After graduating, almost all (95%) of student respondents plan to go into a pre-registration position immediately or after a short break; only two per cent plan to embark on further study or use their optometry degree as a stepping-stone to a different clinical profession, while three per cent are currently unsure.

Respondents were presented with a list of things that were, or will be, important to them when choosing their pre-registration position, and were asked to select all the reasons that were relevant to them; on average, each student chose seven reasons. Table 3.2 presents the results, and shows students particularly value good support and good optometry training and development.

**Table 3.2: Aspects that are important to students in a pre-registration position**

Reason	Number of respondents	%
Good support provided	216	84
It offers good optometry training and development	200	78
Reputation	166	64
Location – close to home	164	64
It offers long term career prospects (beyond the pre-registration period)	147	57
Up-to-date equipment	145	56
High OSCE pass rate	145	56
The culture feels comfortable	125	49
Location – easy commute	121	47
Pay and benefits package	108	42
I like the values	107	42
It offers the opportunity to gain early experience in my specific area(s) of interest	86	33
It offers business/management training in addition to optometry	65	25
Location – an area in the UK I want to move to	38	15
Location – close to my university	19	7
A business belonging to a family member/friend	11	4
Other	4	2

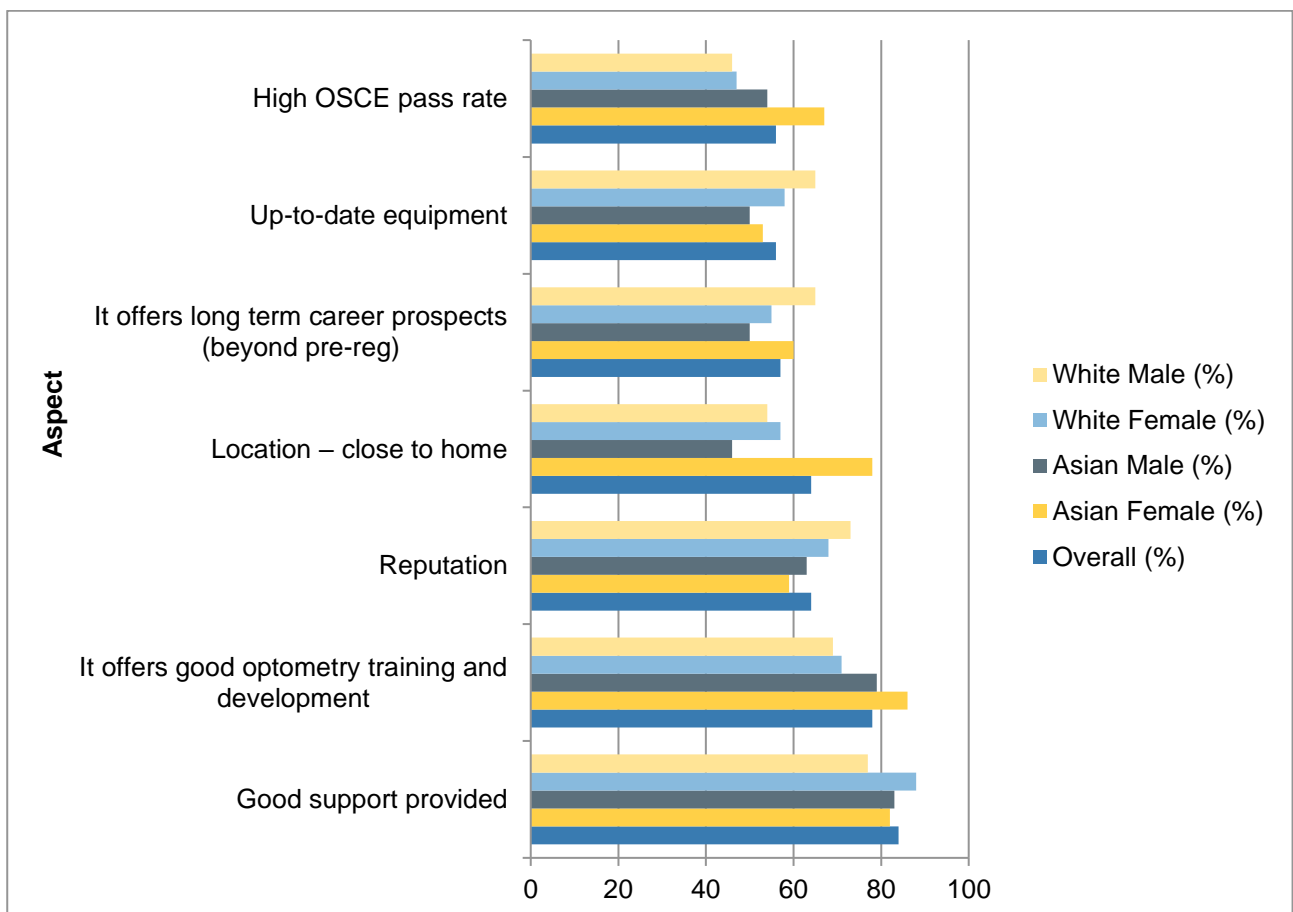
'Other' reasons include friendly staff, being near family, and having a good supervisor.

■ Further analysis by gender and ethnicity shows:

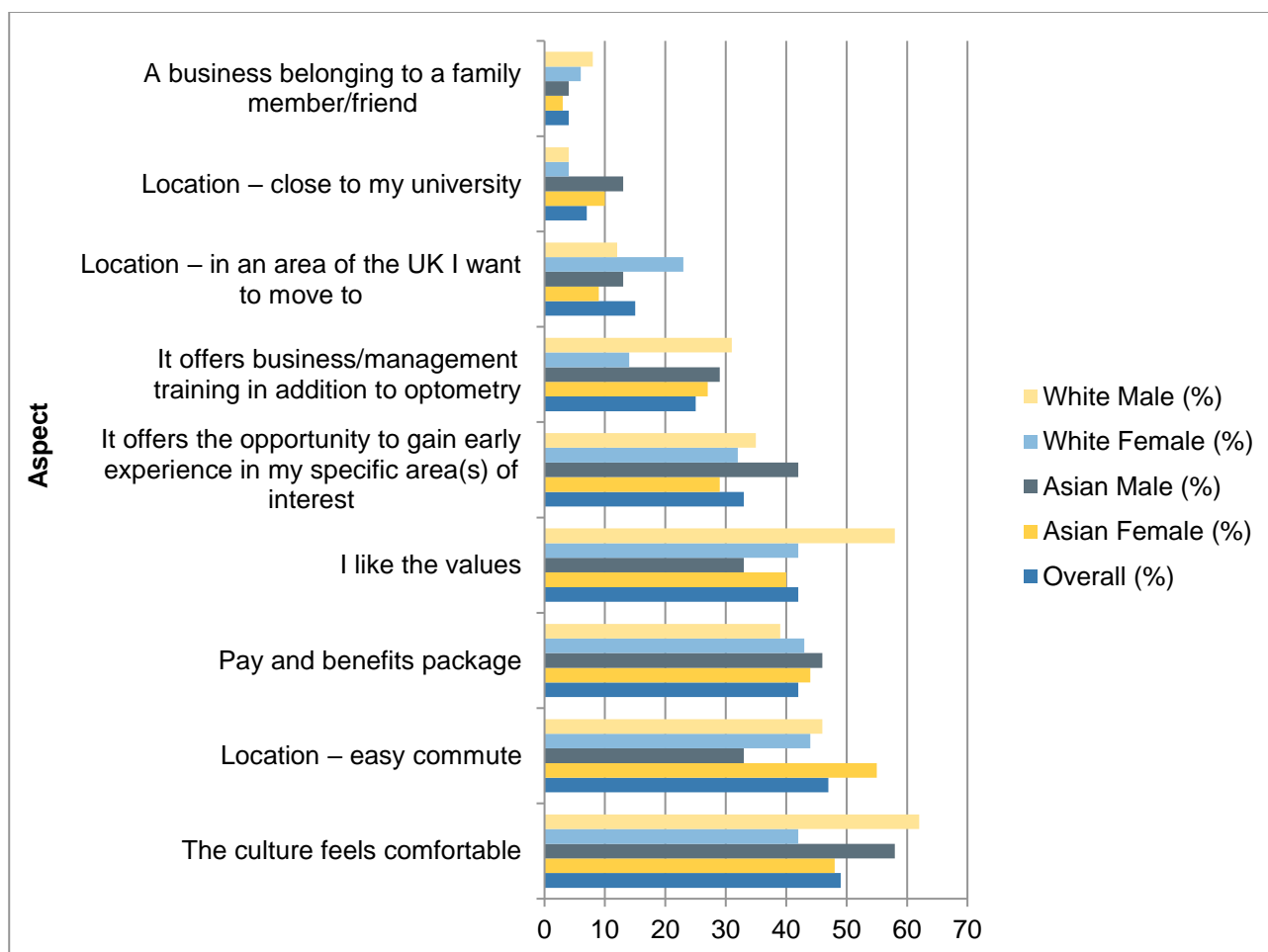
- Men are more likely to cite 'Reputation' (70%), 'The culture feels comfortable' (58%), 'It offers business/management training in addition to optometry' (32%) and the opportunity for early experience in specific areas (41%) more frequently than women (62%, 45%, 22% and 31% respectively). However, women are noticeably more likely to cite 'Location – close to home' (68% of women compared to 54% of men).
- White respondents are more likely to cite 'Reputation' (69%) and 'Location – an area of the UK I want to move to' (21%) than Asian/Asian British respondents (60% and 10%). Asian/Asian British respondents rate 'Location – close to home' (72%), 'High OSCE pass rate' (65%) and 'It offers business/management training in addition to optometry' (28%) more highly than White respondents (56%, 47% and 18% respectively).
- A deeper analysis comparing Asian/Asian British men, Asian/Asian British women, White men and White women gives further insights:

- White men are notably more likely than average to cite ‘Reputation’ (73%) and ‘I like the values’ (58%), while Asian/Asian British men are more likely than average to cite ‘It offers the opportunity to gain early experience in my specific area(s) of interest’ (42%).
  - White women are particularly likely to cite ‘Good support provided’ (88%), and their rating of ‘Location – an area in the UK I want to move to’, while low, is notably higher than average (23%). However, they are much less likely than average to cite ‘It offers business/management training in addition to optometry’ (14%).
  - Asian/Asian British women rate ‘Location – close to home’ noticeably higher than average (78%) and also rate three other aspects more highly than other respondents: ‘It offers good optometry training and development’ (86%), ‘High OSCE pass rate’ (67%) and ‘Location – easy commute’ (55%).
- Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2 present the analysis in bar charts.

**Figure 3.1: What is important to students when choosing a pre-registration position (most important aspects)**



**Figure 3.2: What is important to students when choosing a pre-registration position? (less important aspects)**



- Although there are some differences in response to individual aspects when analysed by expected year of graduation, no clear pattern emerges from this analysis.

Almost half (49%) of students overall already have a pre-registration position lined up. Further analysis by year of graduation shows that almost all (97%) students who will graduate in 2018 have secured their pre-registration position, as have 61 per cent of students planning to graduate in 2019. A minority of students who are at a much earlier stage in their studies appear to be advance planners: 18 per cent of those planning to graduate in 2020, and ten per cent of those planning to graduate in 2021, have already secured their position.

Those who had already secured their pre-registration position were asked if they had received more than one offer, and almost two-thirds (66%) said yes. When asked for further detail, students quoted numbers from one to nine, with a mean average of 2.82.

### 3.2.3 Plans immediately after completion of training

Student respondents were asked about their plans upon completing their pre-registration training. Unsurprisingly, 29 per cent think it is 'too early to say', although the majority (56%) already know that they intend to practise as an optometrist with their pre-



registration employer, in the same geographical area; a further six per cent would like to stay with their pre-registration employer but move to a different geographical area. Five per cent think they will practise with a different employer, while four per cent intend to practise outside the UK. When asked in which country they intend to practise, six people said Canada, with the others giving Australia, the USA, Malaysia and Sri Lanka/India.

## 3.3 Pre-registration optometrists

### 3.3.1 Why optometry?

Respondents were presented with a list of reasons for choosing optometry as a career and were asked to select all the reasons that were relevant to them; on average, each pre-registration optometrist chose six reasons. Table 3.3 presents the results, and shows respondents want to work in healthcare and to help people, and believe that optometry offers good earning/income potential. Although the top two reasons are the same as the students gave, it appears that pre-registration optometrists, who are now earning a salary and presumably giving a lot of practical thought to their future, have a somewhat greater focus on the earning/income potential of their chosen career.

**Table 3.3: Pre-registration optometrists' reasons for choosing optometry**

Reason	Number of respondents	%
I want to work in healthcare	52	81
I want to help people	47	73
It offers good earning/income potential	45	71
It offers opportunities for flexible working	30	48
The idea of working in optometry really interested me	29	46
There are opportunities to work in the private, public or charity sectors	26	41
There is plenty of work available	25	39
I could work anywhere in the UK as an optometrist	25	39
It's a high status profession	24	38
I like the idea of working one-to-one with clients	22	35
It's a fascinating profession	22	34
I'm attracted by the idea of running my own business in the future	18	28
It's a clean profession	18	28
I have family/friends who are optometrists	9	14
Other	6	2

'Other' reasons included a family history of ocular problems.

- As the number of pre-registration respondents is relatively low, further analysis by gender and ethnicity should be treated with caution. However, it is notable that:
  - There are big differences in the percentage of men and women citing the following reasons: 'It's a clean profession' (men 42%, women 18%); 'It offers good earning/income potential' (men 79%, women 66%); 'The idea of working in

optometry really interested me' (men 53%, women 41%), 'It offers opportunities for flexible working' (men 58%, women 41%) and 'I'm attracted by the idea of running my own business in the future' (men 53%, women 11%).

- There are also big differences in the percentage of White and Asian/Asian British respondents, particularly for the following aspects: 'There is plenty of work available' (White 30%, Asian/Asian British 46%), 'I like the idea of working one-to-one with clients' (White 39%, Asian/Asian British 21%), 'There are opportunities to work in the private, public or charity sectors' (White 24%, Asian/Asian British 50%) and 'It offers opportunities for flexible working' (White 34%, Asian/Asian British 54%).

### 3.3.2 Choosing a pre-registration position

Respondents were presented with a list of things that were important to them when they chose their pre-registration position, and were asked to select all the reasons that were relevant to them; on average, each respondent chose five reasons. Table 3.4 presents the results, and shows pre-registration respondents, like students, value good support and good optometry training and development. However, top of the list – perhaps for practical reasons of economy – was 'Location – close to home'. In addition, 'Reputation' is notably less important than it is for students.

**Table 3.4: Aspects that were important to pre-registration optometrists when they chose their position**

Reason	Number of respondents	%
Location – close to home	45	71
Good support provided	44	69
It offers good optometry training and development	32	50
Location – easy commute	26	41
Pay and benefits package	25	39
It offers long term career prospects (beyond the pre-registration period)	24	37
Reputation	23	36
Up-to-date equipment	18	29
The culture feels comfortable	17	27
I like the values	15	24
It offers the opportunity to gain early experience in my specific area(s) of interest	12	19
High OSCE pass rate	11	17
It offers business/management training in addition to optometry	7	11
Location – an area in the UK I want to move to	4	7
Location – close to my university	4	7
A business belonging to a family member/friend	3	5
Other	3	5

'Other' reasons included the position being in a practice where the individual had previously worked in a different role.

Further analysis by gender and ethnicity (with a caveat relating to small numbers) shows:

■ **Gender:**

- The top reason for both men and women is 'Location – close to home' although this is more important for men (79%) than women (66%).
- Men rate 'Pay and benefits package' (53%), 'The culture feels comfortable' (37%) and 'Good support provided' (79%) more highly than women (30%, 21% and 61% respectively).

■ **Ethnicity:**

- White respondents rate 'Reputation' (48%) and 'I like the values' (36%) more highly than Asian/Asian British respondents (27% and 19% respectively), while Asian/Asian British respondents rate 'Location – easy commute' (54%) and 'It offers business/management training in addition to optometry' (19%) more highly than White respondents (29% and 5% respectively).

Three-quarters (75%) of pre-registration optometrists said they had received more than one job offer. The number of offers ranged from one to four, with a mean average of 2.7.

### 3.3.3 Pre-registration position

- Almost all (94%) of pre-registration optometrists work for one employer only. The remaining six per cent divide their time equally between two employers, both of which are large corporate chains. Of those with only one position, 87 per cent work for a large corporate chain, five per cent for a smaller chain, four per cent for an independent business in one location, and four per cent for an NHS eye/optometry clinic.
- When asked about their contracted weekly hours in their pre-registration position, responses ranged from 24 to 45 hours, with a mean average of 38.7 hours.
- When asked about their travel time to and from work added together, responses ranged from three to 180 minutes, with a mode (most commonly-occurring) time of 60 minutes and a mean average of 56 minutes. This suggests that on average, pre-registration optometrists live fairly close to their workplaces. The majority (68%) of pre-registration respondents think their travel time to and from work is 'about right', with a further 25 per cent describing it as 'longer than ideal but manageable'. A small number (7%), however, describe their travel time as 'too long'.
- Only one pre-registration respondent has paid work in addition to the pre-registration position, and this is in a job outside optical work.

### 3.3.4 Plans immediately after completion of training

Respondents were asked about their plans upon completing their pre-registration training. The large majority (85%) said they planned to practise as an optometrist with their existing employer; in many cases, this will be because pre-registration contracts often commit the employee to work for the employer for a fixed time period after registering with the GOC. Of this 85 per cent, four-fifths (80%) planned to remain in their current area, while one-fifth (20%) planned to move to a different geographical area. Ten per cent

planned to practise with a different employer, although all of these individuals bar one said they aimed to stay in the same geographical area. Finally, five per cent said they wanted to take a break from optometry or leave the profession. The small number who gave reasons, when invited to do so, said they were unhappy about the retail focus and sales targets.

## 3.4 GOC-registered practising optometrists

### 3.4.1 Year of registering with the GOC

When asked about the year of fully qualifying as an optometrist (i.e. the year of registering with the GOC), respondents gave years ranging from 1954 to 2018.

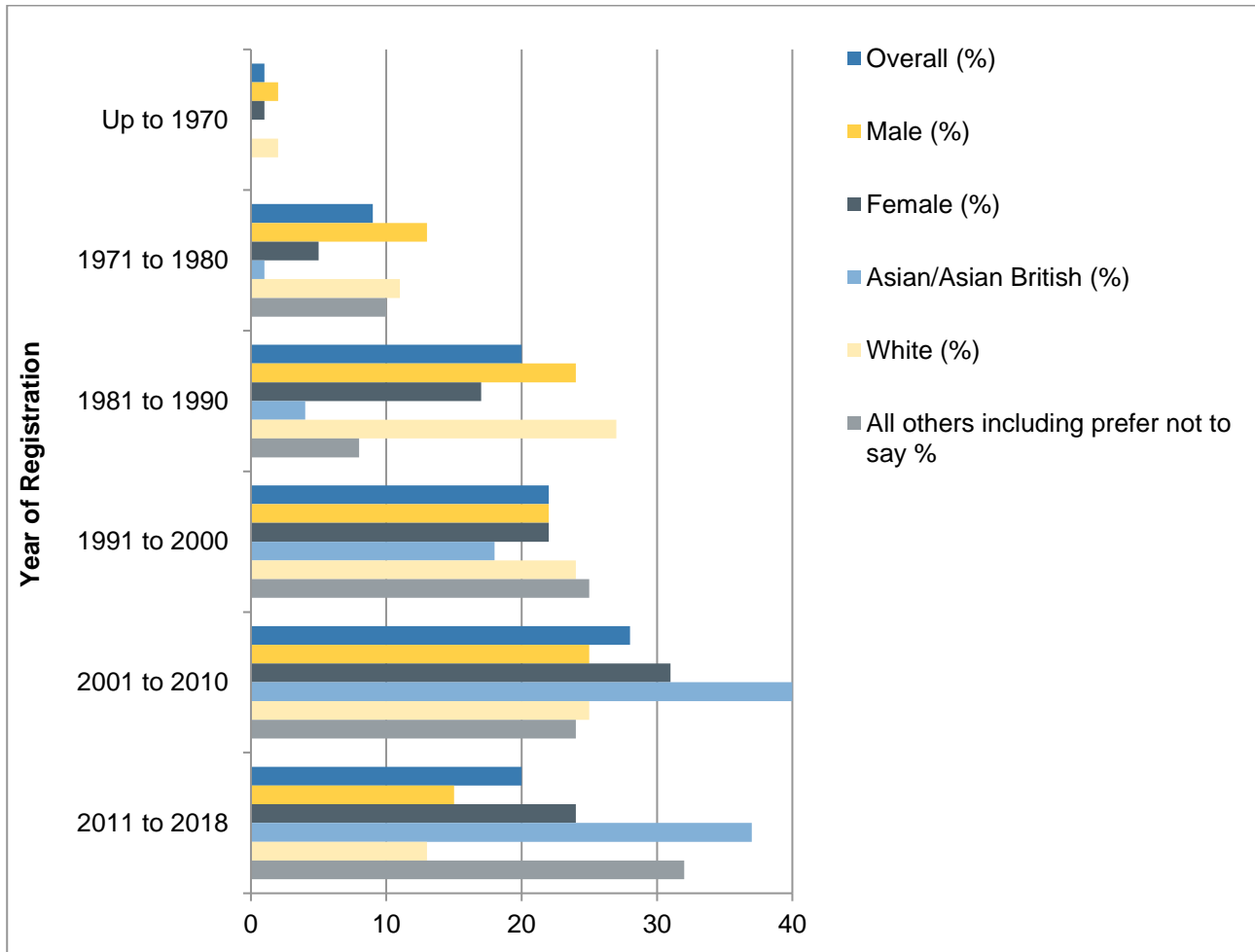
■ The overall percentage breakdown is:

- Up to 1970                    1%
- 1971 to 1980                9%
- 1981 to 1990                20%
- 1991 to 2000                22%
- 2001 to 2010                28%
- 2010 to 2018                20%

■ Further analysis indicates that:

- Up to 1990, more men than women registered with the GOC, but from 1991 onwards, the percentages of women have been higher than the percentages of men, and have been growing; of those who registered with the GOC between 2010 and 2018, over two-thirds (68%) are female.
- To put this another way, the majority (60%) of men responding to this question registered with the GOC before 2001, while the majority of women (55%) registered with the GOC from 2001 onwards (see Figure 3.3).

**Figure 3.3: GOC-registered optometrists by year of registration**



- The optometry profession appears to have been attracting Asian/Asian British men and women mainly from the 1990s onwards. Figure 3.3 also shows that only five per cent of Asian/Asian British respondents registered up to 1990, compared to 40 per cent of White respondents, whereas in more recent years the picture is very different; 77 per cent of Asian/Asian British respondents registered from 2001 onwards, compared to a much lower 38 per cent of White respondents.

### 3.4.2 Optometrists working solely as locums

■ A fairly large minority (27%) of GOC-registered respondents work solely as locums. Their reasons for doing so are given below and show that the flexibility of locum work and its financial reward are the main reasons, although around one-third also gave ‘variety of work’ as a reason. Only three per cent of locums say that they are doing locum work because they are unable to obtain a permanent position or are in between jobs, indicating clearly that locum work is a conscious choice rather than a necessity. Locums were able to select more than one reason; on average, each respondent selected two.

- Flexibility – I can work where and when it suits me 88%
- Financially more rewarding than a permanent position 54%

- 
- Variety of work 35%
  - Income while on a career break to raise a family 4%
  - Income while travelling 3%
  - Unable to obtain a permanent position 2%
  - In between jobs 1.5%
  - Income while studying 1.5%
  - Other 11%
- An analysis of the free text 'other' reasons showed that these fell into several different categories:
- Avoiding the tensions, politics and pressures (e.g. sales targets) of working permanently in a practice or for a corporate
  - Being semi-retired, or easing towards retirement
  - Giving the flexibility and time to take on other interests or other roles (e.g. research, different optical roles, time for the family).
- When asked about the number of different workplaces in which locums had worked in the past four weeks, responses varied considerably from zero to 30, with a mean average of 3.2.
- When asked about the hours worked as a locum in a typical week, responses varied considerably from zero to 150 (with this high figure appearing unlikely), with a mean average of 27.2.
- Further analysis of those working solely as locums shows:
- No significant differences when analysed by gender (26% of men and 28% of women work solely as locums).
  - A notable difference by ethnicity, with 38 per cent of Asian/Asian British respondents working solely as locums compared to 23 per cent of White respondents.
  - No notable differences by age group until the highest age group (61 and over) is reached; here, 43 per cent of respondents work solely as locums, compared to an average of 27 per cent. This is consistent with the 'other' reasons for working solely as a locum given above, of being semi-retired or easing towards retirement.
  - No differences when analysed by caring responsibilities for children, and a slight but not notable difference when analysed by adult caring responsibilities: 31 per cent of those with adult caring responsibilities work solely as locums, compared to 26 per cent of those without such responsibilities.
- Further analysis of the reasons why respondents work solely as locums show few differences, apart from:
- White female respondents are particularly likely to cite 'Flexibility' (95%).
  - White male respondents are more likely than average to cite 'Variety of work' (48%).

- White male and White female respondents are more likely than average to cite 'Financially more rewarding than a permanent position' (70% and 72% respectively).
- White female respondents are more likely than average to cite 'Income while on a career break to raise a family' (11%).
- Those aged 21 to 30 are more likely than average to cite 'Flexibility' (97%).
- Those aged 21 to 30 and 31 to 40 are more likely than average to cite 'Variety of work' (44% and 45% respectively).
- The 21 to 30 age group is notably more likely to cite 'Financially more rewarding than a paid position' (86%).

### 3.4.3 GOC-registered optometrists with permanent positions

#### How many positions?

When asked about their permanent optometry positions (for which they are paid or which generate income, as opposed to unpaid voluntary work), the large majority of respondent optometrists (83%) indicate that they have only one permanent position. However, 13 per cent have two positions, two per cent have three positions, and just under two per cent have more than three.

- Further analysis shows that 82 per cent of male respondents and 84 per cent of female respondents have only one position.
  - Fifteen per cent of male respondents have two positions, two per cent have three and one per cent have more than three.
  - Twelve per cent of female respondents have two positions, two per cent have three and two per cent have more than three.
- There are no clear differences when the number of positions is analysed by ethnicity.
- Some differences are apparent when analysed by age, in that those aged 51 and over are more likely to have more than one position: 20 per cent of those aged 51 to 60 and 22 per cent of those aged 60 and over have two or more positions.

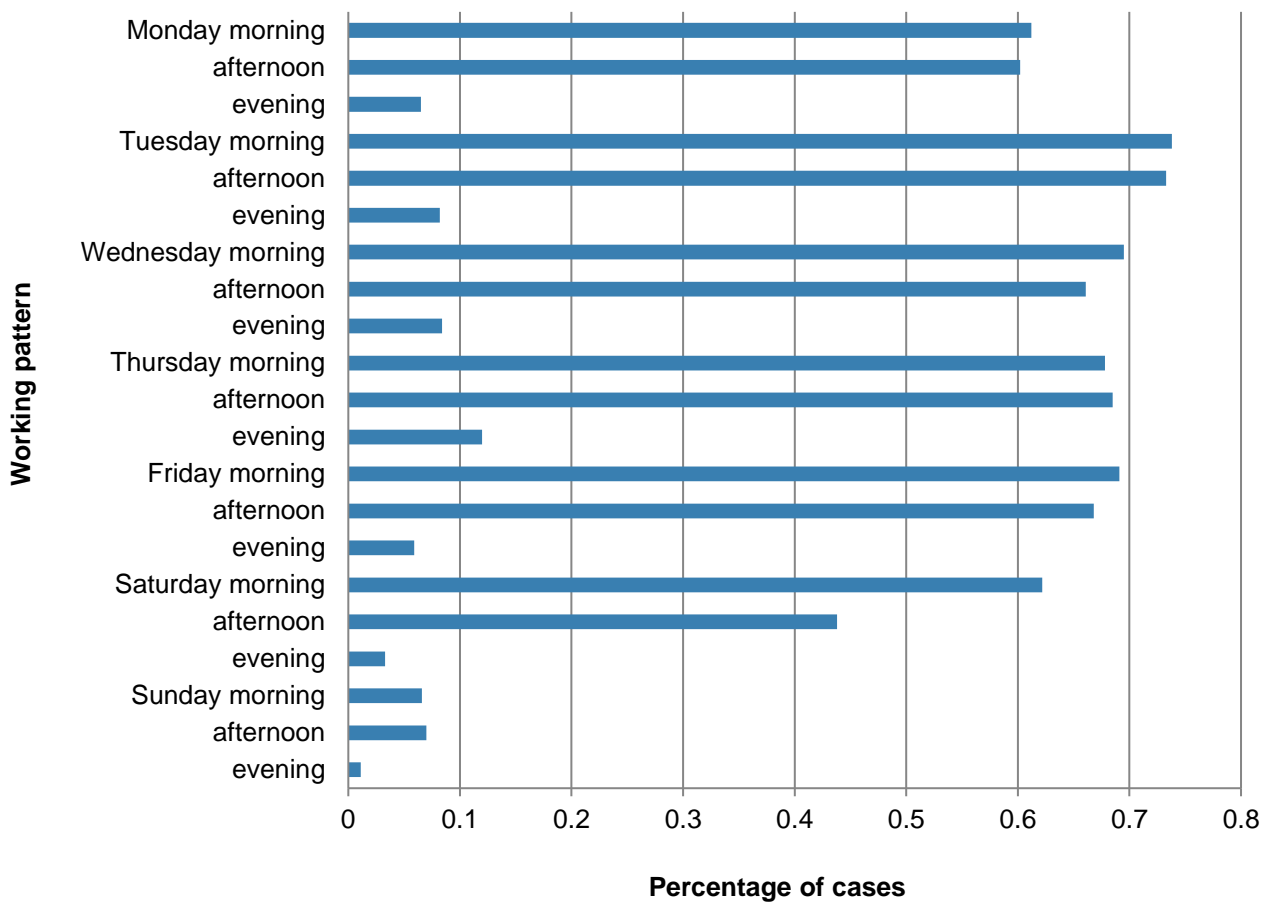
#### Position 1

- The percentage breakdown for the type of organisation worked in for position 1 is:
  - Large corporate chain 35%
  - Independent business 28%
  - Small chain 21%
  - Hospital eye service 11%
  - University – teaching 2%
  - University – clinic 1%

- 
- Private hospitals group 1%
  - Charity <1%
  - Other 2%
    - 'Other' free text responses mostly described 'domiciliary' work or working as an independent (rather than being an employee) for other employers; in addition, NHS clinics, occupational medicals and community clinics were mentioned, as was advisory or assessment work for NHS England or the College of Optometrists.
  - Six per cent of respondents indicate their position 1 workplace is in Northern Ireland, 11 per cent in Scotland and seven per cent in Wales. The large majority (77%) are based in England, with the following percentage breakdown (expressed as a percentage within the UK):
    - East Midlands 6.5%
    - East of England 8.5%
    - London 9.5%
    - North East 4.5%
    - North West 11.5%
    - South East 10%
    - South West 7%
    - West Midlands 8.5%
    - Yorkshire and The Humber 10%
  - When asked to select all the aspects that had attracted the optometrist to this position, respondents selected, on average, between three and four aspects:
    - I like the values 46%
    - Location – close to home 40%
    - Reputation 39%
    - The culture feels comfortable 37%
    - Up-to-date equipment 30%
    - Pay and benefits package 29%
    - Good optometry training and development 27%
    - Location – easy commute 23%
    - Opportunity to specialise in area(s) of interest 23%
    - Ability to work flexible hours 21%
    - Long-term career prospects 20%
    - Business belongs to family/friend 10%
    - Business/management training as well as optometry 8%



- Location – area of UK wanted to move to 6%
- May lead to being a JVP/franchisee in future 5%
- Other 13%
  - An analysis of the free text ‘Other’ responses indicated that the majority (62%) of these related to the individual owning the business. In addition, seven per cent found the working hours favourable, six per cent indicated reasons due to job satisfaction, five per cent said they had interests in clinical practice, teaching or research, five per cent wanted continuity after their pre-registration period, five per cent said the position was less pressured than working for a corporate, four per cent had experienced a merger or takeover, three per cent were offered a senior position, and a further three per cent were tied into remaining at their pre-registration workplace.
- Further analysis of position 1 data by gender, ethnicity and age indicates:
  - Forty-four per cent are male and 56 per cent are female
  - Seventy-two per cent are White, 22 per cent Asian/Asian British, three per cent other minority ethnic groups, and three per cent prefer not to say.
  - Respondents in the youngest age group (21 to 30) are the most likely to have only one income-earning position (87%, compared to 83% of all age groups) and those aged 61 and over are the least likely (78%).
- Fifty-nine per cent have full time positions, with 41 per cent being part time.
- Figure 3.4 shows the percentage of respondents who work on different days of the week and at different times (morning, afternoon and evening).

**Figure 3.4: Working pattern in position 1**

- This shows that Tuesday is the day on which the highest percentage of respondents work in position 1 (around 73%), followed by three weekdays that have similar percentages (around 67 or 68%): Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Of all the weekdays, Monday has the lowest percentage (60 or 61%). A relatively high percentage of respondents work on a Saturday, especially in the mornings, and around seven per cent work on a Sunday. Although evening work is not frequent, between six and 12 per cent of respondents work evenings, notably on Tuesdays.
- In addition, a small number of respondents (1.5%) say they sometimes have to work nights. An analysis of the free text responses suggests that this 'night' working usually relates to paperwork related to running a business; judging by the times provided by some respondents, it is more likely to be working late into the evening rather than having to be on duty as an optometrist all night.

## Position 2

### ■ The percentage breakdown for the type of organisation worked in for position 2 is:

- Hospital eye service 30%
- Large corporate chain 14%
- Independent business 14%
- University – teaching 8%
- Small chain 7%
- University – clinic 5%
- Private hospitals group 2%
- Charity 1%
- Other 18%

- ‘Other’ responses for position 2 mostly described working for the College of Optometrists (usually as an assessor) or working as an adviser for NHS England, a clinical commissioning group or a health board. In addition, a few respondents described working for the GOC or AOP, or private, charity or prison work.
- An analysis by gender, ethnicity and age shows that there are no significant differences by gender. However, Asian/Asian British respondents are more likely to say their second position is with a larger corporate chain than for any other type of organisation (35% of Asian/Asian British respondents with a second position), while White respondents are more likely to work for the Hospital Eye Service (33% of White respondents with a second position) or for ‘Other’ organisations (21%). The age analysis suggests that a second position working for a large corporate chain is most likely for those aged 21 to 40 (around 30% of respondents in these age groups with a second position) while for older respondents the second position is most likely to be for the Hospital Eye Service (around 35%) or for ‘Other’ organisations (20%).

### ■ Three per cent of respondents indicate their position 2 workplace is in Northern Ireland, eight per cent in Scotland and 7.5 per cent in Wales. The large majority (82%, compared to 77% of position 1 jobs) are based in England, with the following percentage breakdown (expressed as a percentage within the UK):

- East Midlands 3%
- East of England 10%
- London 9%
- North East 4%
- North West 12.5%
- South East 12%
- South West 10%

- West Midlands 11%
- Yorkshire and The Humber 10.5%

■ When asked to select all the aspects that had attracted the optometrist to this position, respondents selected, on average, three aspects:

- I like the values 46%
- Opportunity to specialise in area(s) of interest 37%
- Reputation 35%
- The culture feels comfortable 35%
- Good optometry training and development 27%
- Pay and benefits package 24%
- Long-term career prospects 21%
- Location – close to home 20%
- Ability to work flexible hours 19%
- Up-to-date equipment 16%
- Location – easy commute 14%
- Business belongs to family/friend 5%
- Location – area of UK wanted to move to 4%
- Business/management training as well as optometry 3%
- May lead to being a JVP/franchisee in future 1%
- Other 13%

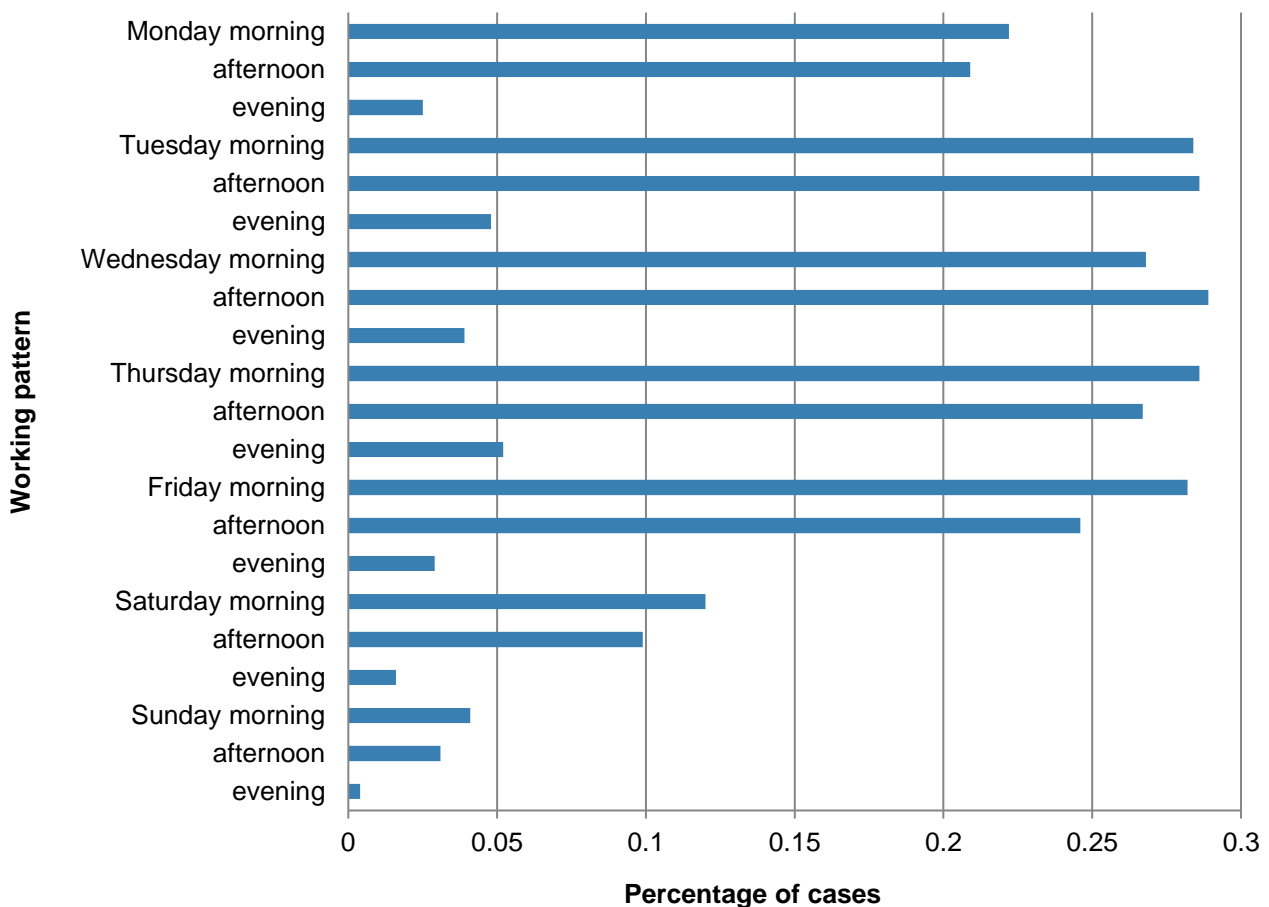
- An analysis of the free text 'Other' responses indicated that respondents were attracted by the variety or type of work on offer, liked the idea of 'giving back' to the profession, for example through teaching, or were gaining new skills in the position.

- An analysis by gender, ethnicity and age indicates that the top three reasons for male respondents with a second position are the values (47%), reputation (42%) and culture (41%), while for females with a second position the top three are values (45%), the opportunity to specialise (37%) and good optometry training and development (34%). For Asian/Asian British respondents, the top three reasons are values (46%), reputation (41%) and pay and benefits (33%), while for White respondents the top reasons are values (48%), the opportunity to specialise (40%) and culture (37%). The age analysis indicates that respondents in the different age groups have different top priorities. The top reasons are: aged 21 to 30 - good optometry training and development (53%), aged 31 to 40 - reputation (40%), aged 41 to 50 - values (55%), aged 51 to 60 - values (46%) and aged 61 and over - the opportunity to specialise (58%).

■ Six per cent say that position 2 is full time (which seems a little unlikely, given that it is their second position), with 94 per cent being part time.

- The percentage breakdown of the working pattern of days and times (morning, afternoon and evening) shows that, as would be expected given the part-time nature of most second positions, the percentages working on any particular day and time are relatively low in comparison to position 1.
  - Figure 3.5 shows the breakdown, and indicates that, as for position 1, it is somewhat less likely for respondents to work on a Monday compared to other weekdays (around 21% compared to around 27 or 28% for other days); and that a relatively high 12 per cent report working on a Saturday morning.

**Figure 3.5: Working pattern in position 2**



- In addition, three per cent of respondents say they sometimes have to work nights in position 2. As for position 1, the ‘night’ work described mostly related to evening and late evening paperwork related to running a business rather than having to be on duty all night as an optometrist.

**Position 3**

- Most of the small number of respondents (30) who gave details of their third position worked for a small chain (24%), an independent business (14%) or an ‘other’ organisation (45%). An analysis of the free text ‘Other’ responses indicated that these mostly related to working for the College of Optometrists.

- 
- When asked to select all the aspects that had attracted the optometrist to this position, respondents selected, on average, four aspects:
    - I like the values 52%
    - Opportunity to specialise in area(s) of interest 41%
    - Reputation 62%
    - The culture feels comfortable 34%
    - Long-term career prospects 31%
    - Ability to work flexible hours 31%
    - Pay and benefits package 29%
    - Location – close to home 24%
    - Location – easy commute 24%
    - Up-to-date equipment 18%
    - Good optometry training and development 14%
    - Business belongs to family/friend 14%
    - Business/management training as well as optometry 12%
    - Location – area of UK wanted to move to 7%
    - May lead to being a JVP/franchisee in future 3%
    - Other 7%
  - The number of respondents is too small to allow further analysis by gender, ethnicity and age.
  - The majority of respondents work in England (82%) for position 3, with a small number working in Scotland and Wales, and none in Northern Ireland.
  - Almost all (94%) say the position is part time.
  - The number of respondents is too small to allow robust analysis of the working pattern (days of the week and times of the day), although it appears that Tuesdays and Thursdays are the most likely days, followed by Wednesdays and Saturdays. No respondents say they have to work nights in position 3.

### Additional work

- In addition to their paid/income-generating position(s), GOC-registered respondents were asked if they carried out any locum work; advisory work for an optical body such as the GOC, AOP, LOCSU, the NHS or a university; or unpaid work for an optical charity. The responses indicate that:
  - Nineteen per cent do locum work
  - Twelve per cent do advisory work
  - Six per cent do unpaid work for a charity.

- However, it should be noted that some respondents described their work for positions 2 and 3 as being in one or more of these three categories, suggesting a degree of respondent misunderstanding. Regardless of this, an analysis by gender, ethnicity and age indicates that:
  - Men are more likely than women to report doing advisory work; 17 per cent of men, compared to eight per cent of women, are doing this kind of additional work. There are no significant differences, however, in the percentages of men and women doing additional locum work or unpaid charity work.
  - Asian/Asian British respondents are more likely to report doing additional locum work when compared to White respondents (29% compared to 15%). There are no significant differences by ethnicity with regard to additional advisory work or unpaid charity work.
  - Those aged 21 to 40 are more likely than average, and those aged 41 and over less likely than average, to report doing additional locum work (25% compared to 14%, compared to an average of 19%). In addition, those aged between 51 and 70 are more likely than average to do additional advisory work (17% compared to 13% on average) and unpaid charity work (9% compared to an average of 6%).

## Pay

Due to the different circumstances of GOC-registered respondents (having more than one position, doing additional work, and working different hours), the pay analysis has been carried out using the income data for respondents who say they work 30 or more hours a week across their three positions; in addition, outliers (i.e. people quoting very high or very low figures) have not been included in the analysis. Even with these provisos, the pay/income data – which was not provided at all by some respondents, and expressed in different ways by others – should be treated with a degree of caution, especially as it is difficult to make robust comparisons between paid employees and those whose income is gained via running a business.

- Overall, the hourly pay/income rate of those respondents included in the analysis is £25.42.
- Broken down by gender, the hourly rate is: males £29.44, females £25.91.
- Comparing Asian/Asian British respondents with White respondents, the hourly rate by ethnicity is: Asian/Asian British £24.37, White £25.91.
  - Further analysis by ethnicity gives the following hourly rates, although caution is needed here due to the relatively small numbers involved:
    - White Males: £30.70 (N=157)
    - Asian/Asian British Males: £26.33 (N=42)
    - White Female: £22.56 (N=220)
    - Asian/Asian British Female: £23.29 (N=68).
- Broken down by age, and using only ages 21 to 60 due to the relatively low numbers of respondents aged 61 and over who provided pay/income data, the hourly rate is: aged

21 to 30 £20.30, aged 31 to 40 £23.79, aged 41 to 50 £30.57 and aged 51 to 60 £29.52.

To gain insights into the predictors of different rates of pay, a regression analysis was run using 'hourly pay' as the outcome variable. The regression only included GOC-registered optometrists working more than 30 hours across their three positions (due to sample size). The predictor variables used in the regression are: age group, gender, whether the individual has a child or children, whether the individual is female and has a child or children, ethnicity, whether the individual has an impairment, their total working hours, region of the UK (country for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and region for England), and whether the individual both has a child and is a carer for one or more adults. The total number of respondents included in the analysis is 402. Only the statistically significant results are given below.

- Using 21 to 30 year olds as a benchmark: on average 31 to 40 year olds earn 13.7 per cent more per hour, holding all else constant; on average 41 to 50 year olds earn 27.4 per cent more per hour, holding all else constant and on average 51 to 60 year olds earn 25.5 per cent more per hour, holding all else constant.
- On average women earn 15.5 per cent less per hour than men, holding all else constant.
- Using the East of England as the reference category (as it is the largest group): those in Northern Ireland earn 28.4 per cent less per hour, those in Scotland and the North East earn 15.7 per cent less per hour, those in the South East earn 12.9 per cent less per hour and those in the West Midlands earn 18.7 per cent less per hour, holding all else constant.

An amendment was then made to the model; willingness to move was added to the possible predictor variables, to see if being prepared to move around the UK had an impact on earnings. This proved not to be the case, in that the impact on earnings was not statistically significant.



## 4 Career intentions and aspirations

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This chapter focuses on the medium to longer-term career intentions of pre-registration and GOC-registered optometrists. Shorter term plans, such as intentions after completing pre-registration positions, have already been covered in the previous chapter.

### 4.1 Pre-registration optometrists

The only question asked of pre-registration optometrists that required them to look beyond the short-term future was 'Do you have aspirations to manage your own business at some point in the future?' Unsurprisingly at this stage of their career, just over one-third (36%) are 'unsure'. However, 16 per cent answered with a clear 'no', while one-third (34%) would like to manage their own business 'as an independent business owner' and a further 13 per cent 'as a joint venture partner/franchisee' of a large corporate chain.

Further analysis shows that male respondents are far more likely to say 'yes' (64% compared to 39% of females, with 26% of females saying 'no') and that, overall, there is no difference by ethnicity apart from a higher percentage of Asian/Asian British respondents being 'unsure' (48% compared to 32% of White respondents). In addition, Asian/Asian British men are notably likely to say 'yes' (67%).

### 4.2 GOC-registered practising optometrists

#### 4.2.1 Medium and longer-term career intentions

Practising optometrists were asked about their career intentions up to five years ahead, and their longer-term aspirations.

Within the next five years, the majority (63%) of respondents plan to continue with their current optometry position(s). A further 13 per cent plan to change their position(s) but stay in the same geographic area, while five per cent aim to move to another geographical area to work as an optometrist. A small number (2%) want to leave the UK to practise as an optometrist in another country. When asked which country, Australia was the most frequently-given answer, with six responses. Other countries accounting for more than one response were Colombia (3) and Kenya (2). Eleven per cent plan to leave the profession entirely due to retirement, leaving six per cent who plan to leave the profession entirely due to reasons other than retirement.

Further analysis shows:

- There is very little difference between male and female respondents, apart from a slightly higher percentage of men intending to retire (15% compared to 11%), which is in line with the overall age distribution of male and female respondents.
- There are some small differences by ethnicity, in that Asian/Asian British respondents are more likely than average to intend to change positions but stay in the same geographic area (19%) or move to a different area of the UK (9%); and White respondents are less likely to do so (11% and 3% respectively), while being more likely than average to retire (15%). Again, these findings are understandable given that Asian/Asian British respondents are younger overall than White respondents and therefore likely to be at an earlier career stage.
- An age analysis shows that, unsurprisingly, 50 per cent of those aged 61 and over plan to retire within the next five years. Other findings are that respondents aged 41 to 50 are more likely than average to say they plan to stay in their current position (76%) while those aged 21 to 30 are more likely than average to plan to change positions but stay in the same geographic area (27%) or move elsewhere in the UK (27%); however, even among this younger group, 49 per cent do not plan to change their current position.
- Those with responsibility for staffing decisions are more likely to plan to stay in their current position (74%, compared to 66% of those without staffing responsibilities) and are also more likely to plan to retire (19% compared to 10%).
- An analysis by UK country shows very few differences, apart from those in Northern Ireland being most likely to plan to stay in their current position (89%).

Those who said they planned to leave the profession entirely for reasons other than retirement (108 respondents) were asked to provide some free text to explain why, and 87 people provided this further detail. The most frequently-given answers were that: they wanted to pursue other interests, such as travel, a different clinical role or a completely different career (20 responses); there was increasing stress and pressure in the job (17); optometry is no longer fulfilling (14); optometry has been devalued as a profession (11); the pay is too low, with no increases for years (7); and there is too much focus on selling glasses or expensive lenses (6). Other reasons cited by fewer than five people were that there is no opportunity for progression, corporates are putting increasing pressure on independents, and the job makes too many demands on family and health, with inflexible hours and weekend working.

Longer term (over five years ahead), the large majority of respondents plan to stay within the optometry profession, either 'indefinitely, or until I retire' (58%) or 'for at least five years before considering my options' (29%). Three per cent have specific retirement plans and seven per cent are undecided, leaving three per cent who definitely want to leave the profession for reasons other than retirement. The reasons given for wanting to leave the profession longer-term are fairly similar to those given by those who plan to leave in the short to medium term: pressure or stress in the job (13 responses); pay is too low (8); too

much focus on sales (5); other professional or personal interests (5); and reputation of optometry as a profession/optometry is undervalued (5).

#### 4.2.2 Managing own business

When those without current staffing responsibilities were asked 'Do you have aspirations to manage your own business at some point in the future?', three-quarters (74%) of respondents said 'no'. However, 16 per cent would like to manage their own business 'as an independent business owner' a further seven per cent 'as a joint venture partner/franchisee' of a large corporate chain, and a further two per cent 'as an employed manager'.

Further analysis shows:

- A higher percentage of male than female respondents want to manage their own business as an independent (22% compared with 14%), and females are more likely than males to say 'no' (78% compared to 67%).
- Asian/Asian British respondents are more likely than White respondents to have aspirations for managing an independent business (25% compared to 12%) or being a JVP/franchisee (14% compared to 4%); and far more White respondents say 'no' (82%) than Asian/Asian British (59%). However, this is not surprising when the different age profiles of these two groups of respondents are taken into consideration.
- As might be expected, an aspiration to manage their own business (as an independent or JVP/franchisee) is at its highest in the 31 to 40 age group (24% and 18%) and declines as age increases; among respondents aged 51 and over, only five per cent have such aspirations, and 94 per cent respond with a 'no'.
- To find out if there is a 'typical' optometrist with aspirations to own/manage a business, a logistic regression analysis was undertaken. The outcome variable was a response of 'yes' to aspiring to own or manage a business at some point in the future, either as an independent, a JCP/franchisee or paid manager. The predictor variables tested for relevance were: age group, gender, whether the individual has a child or children, whether the individual is female and has a child/children, ethnicity, whether the individual has an impairment, total working hours, UK country and region, responsibility for an adult dependant, whether the individual has caring responsibilities for both types of dependant, and whether the individual is willing to move for their ideal position (N= 529). The results showed that:
  - Those aged 21 to 30 year old are 4.5 times more likely to aspire to own/manage a business compared to those aged 41 to 50, holding all else equal; and those aged 31 to 40 are 1.9 times more likely to have such aspiration compared to those aged 41 to 50, holding all else equal.
  - Men are 2.8 times more likely to aspire to manage their own business than women, holding all else equal.
  - Those who describe their ethnicity as Asian/Asian British are 1.7 times more likely to aspire to manage their own business than White individuals, holding all else constant.

- There are no geographical differences in business aspirations.
- The other variables tested in the regression model did not make a significant difference.

### 4.2.3 Clinical and professional qualifications and aspirations

Over one-third (38%) of practising optometrists already have additional qualifications. When asked to identify the areas in which they have qualifications, the following responses were given (percentage of those with qualifications):

- Primary Care extended services accreditation (WOPEC LOCSU) 63%
- College Professional Certificates (eg glaucoma) 34%
- Independent prescribing 30%
- College Higher Diplomas 9%
- Other 23%

Practising optometrists were asked whether they had any aspirations in specific clinical and professional areas, and were given a list of these to choose from; respondents were able to select all options that applied, and on average each respondent selected between four and five. Table 4.1 shows the overall responses to this question, and indicates that there is considerable appetite for gaining further understanding and extending into different areas of optometry, particularly with regard to the management of specific conditions, extended primary care services, and advanced diagnostics. However, one note of caution is that respondents may be more likely to respond positively to qualifications that already exist or are easily recognised as part of an optometrist's skill set.

**Table 4.1: Practising optometrists' clinical and professional aspirations**

Clinical or professional area	No.	%
Further education in the management of specific conditions, e.g. glaucoma, medical retina	892	68
Further education in extended primary care services, e.g. MECS, triage, pre-operative cataract, repeat measures, glaucoma referral refinement	820	62
Advanced diagnostics e.g. OCT and Optomap	768	58
Independent prescribing	545	41
Teaching and supervision (pre-registration and university clinics, lecturing, examining)	449	34
Minor surgery, e.g. dealing with meibomian cysts	388	29
Hospital optometry	361	27
Contact lens specialist/complex contact lens practice/specialist contact lenses	308	23
Business skills (administration, finance, operational management, practice ownership, clinical governance)	284	22
Public health interventions (e.g. nutrition, healthy living, smoking cessation)	226	17
Intraocular injections	215	16

Clinical or professional area	No.	%
Working with complex patients (e.g. paediatrics; people with learning disabilities, dementia or brain injuries)	211	16
Doctor in ophthalmology/Pathway to ophthalmology	196	15
Binocular visions/orthoptics	171	13
LVA specialist	166	13
Sports vision	124	9
Commissioning/regulation	114	9
Behavioural optometry	88	7
Other	31	2

Further analysis indicates:

#### ■ Age:

- Those in their 20s and 30s are more likely than average to aspire to further education in the management of specific conditions, minor surgery, intraocular injection, independent prescribing, and sports vision.
- Those in their 20s are more likely than average to aspire to hospital optometry, working with complex patients, business skills, doctor in ophthalmology and, in particular, teaching and supervision; 52 per cent of those in their 20s would like to acquire skills in teaching and supervision.
- There is not much difference, by age band, in aspirations for advanced diagnostics and further education in extended primary services.

#### ■ Gender:

- Men are more likely than women to have aspirations in contact lens specialism, minor surgery, intraocular injections, advanced diagnostics, sports vision, commissioning/regulation, doctor in optometry and, in particular, business skills; 27 per cent of men would like to acquire business skills, compared to 18 per cent of women.
- Women are more likely than men to have aspirations in public health interventions, working with complex patients, and in particular hospital optometry; 31 per cent of women would like to acquire skills in hospital optometry, compared to 22 per cent of men.

#### ■ Ethnicity:

- When the two largest ethnic groups are compared, those of Asian/Asian British ethnicity are more likely than those of White ethnicity to aspire to further education in the management of specific conditions, minor surgery, intraocular injections, public health interventions, sports vision, teaching and supervision, and doctor in optometry.
- White respondents, however, are more likely to aspire to contact lens specialism and working with complex patients.
- A small note of caution is needed here, however, in that the Asian/Asian British optometrists are more likely to be at the younger end of the age profile of

respondents, and so are perhaps more likely to have a longer list of skills they would like to acquire.

■ Aspirations to run own business:

- Those who want to run their own business at some point in the future are more likely to aspire to further clinical and professional qualifications. Taking the three top areas, 76 per cent of aspiring owners/managers would like further education in the management of specific conditions compared to 64 per cent of those who said 'no' to having 'own business' aspirations; 71 per cent would like further education in extended primary services (compared to 60% saying 'no'); and 64 per cent aspire to advanced diagnostics (compared to 54% saying 'no').
- Aspiring business owners/managers are far more likely to want to acquire business skills than those without 'own business' aspirations (41% compared to 8% saying 'no'), although it is perhaps a little surprising that the percentage is as low as 41.

■ Working solely as a locum:

- There are no significant differences between those who work solely as locums and those who do not, in that the percentages aspiring to further clinical and professional qualifications are very similar.

## 5 Geographical mobility

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### 5.1 Students

Student optometrists were asked in which country they were living before applying for their optometry degree. Two-thirds (67%) of student respondents said they were living in England, with nine per cent living in Wales, seven per cent in Scotland, six per cent in Northern Ireland and 12 per cent outside the UK.

When asked if they were still living at the same address now as when they were studying, 44 per cent said yes and 53 per cent no, with the remaining three per cent preferring not to say. A comparison of students' current university and their country of residence before starting their degree indicates that Cardiff was the only university outside England to attract a large percentage of its optometry students from outside the UK country in which it is located. Of the 49 students at Cardiff, 16 were living in Wales when they applied for their degree course, but 22 were living in England, three in Northern Ireland and eight outside the UK. By contrast, all but one of the students from Glasgow Caledonian responding to the survey were living in Scotland when they applied for their course, and 11 of the 15 students at Ulster were living in Northern Ireland when they applied.

### 5.2 Pre-registration optometrists

#### 5.2.1 Location

Pre-registration optometrists were asked in which country they were living before applying for their optometry degree. Over two-thirds (71%) of student respondents said they were living in England, with 11 per cent living in Northern Ireland, five per cent in Scotland, five per cent in Wales and eight per cent outside the UK.

When asked if they lived at the same address while they were studying, 30 per cent said yes (notably lower than the 44 per cent of students still living at the same address) and 70 per cent no. A comparison of pre-registration optometrists' university and their country of residence before starting their degree indicates that, again, Cardiff seems different from the other universities offering an optometry degree in terms of the students it attracts; of the 14 pre-registration optometrists who had studied at Cardiff, only two had lived in Wales when they applied.

Pre-registration optometrists are predominantly working in England while in their pre-registration positions (80%), with seven per cent in Scotland, seven per cent in Wales and six per cent in Northern Ireland. Overall 87 per cent of pre-registration optometrists currently based in England, 75 per cent of those based in Scotland, 100 per cent of those



based in Northern Ireland, and 75 per cent of those based in Wales had lived in these countries before applying for their degree.

### 5.2.2 For an ideal new position...

The majority of pre-registration optometrists (61%) would be prepared to move to another location in the UK for an ideal new position. However, 33 per cent would prefer to stay in their current location, while six per cent are not able to move from their current location.

Table 5.1 shows, for those who would be prepared to move, the types of areas where pre-registration optometrists are living now compared with the types of areas in which they would be prepared to live for an ideal position (with respondents being asked to tick all the types of area they would be prepared to move to).

**Table 5.1: Comparison between where pre-registration optometrists work now, compared to where they would be prepared to move to for an ideal position**

Type of area	Work now %	Prepared to move to %
A densely-populated area, e.g. a big city	51	72
An urban area but not too busy, e.g. a town	47	79
An area with good local transport links	42	42
An area with good transport links to the rest of the UK	30	60
A mixed urban/rural area	20	62
An area requiring a car for reliable transport	12	38
A predominantly rural area	4	35
A geographically remote area (remote from cities, towns and large settlements)	0	17
Other	0	4

Table 5.1 indicates that, at least for those prepared to move, there is a reasonable degree of flexibility over the type of area where respondents are willing to live – although there is a clear preference for urban living and good transport links.

However, when asked specifically about country of the UK and region within country, more preferences start to emerge.

- Twenty-six per cent of those prepared to move would consider anywhere in England; however, the majority have a preference for certain regions; these respondents are clear that the West Midlands, London, the South West and the North West are the most preferred areas, with the East of England the least preferred.
- Sixty-one per cent would consider anywhere in Northern Ireland, although those with a preference for a certain area would clearly prefer Belfast.
- Forty-one per cent would consider anywhere in Scotland, although those with a preference would clearly prefer the Central area.



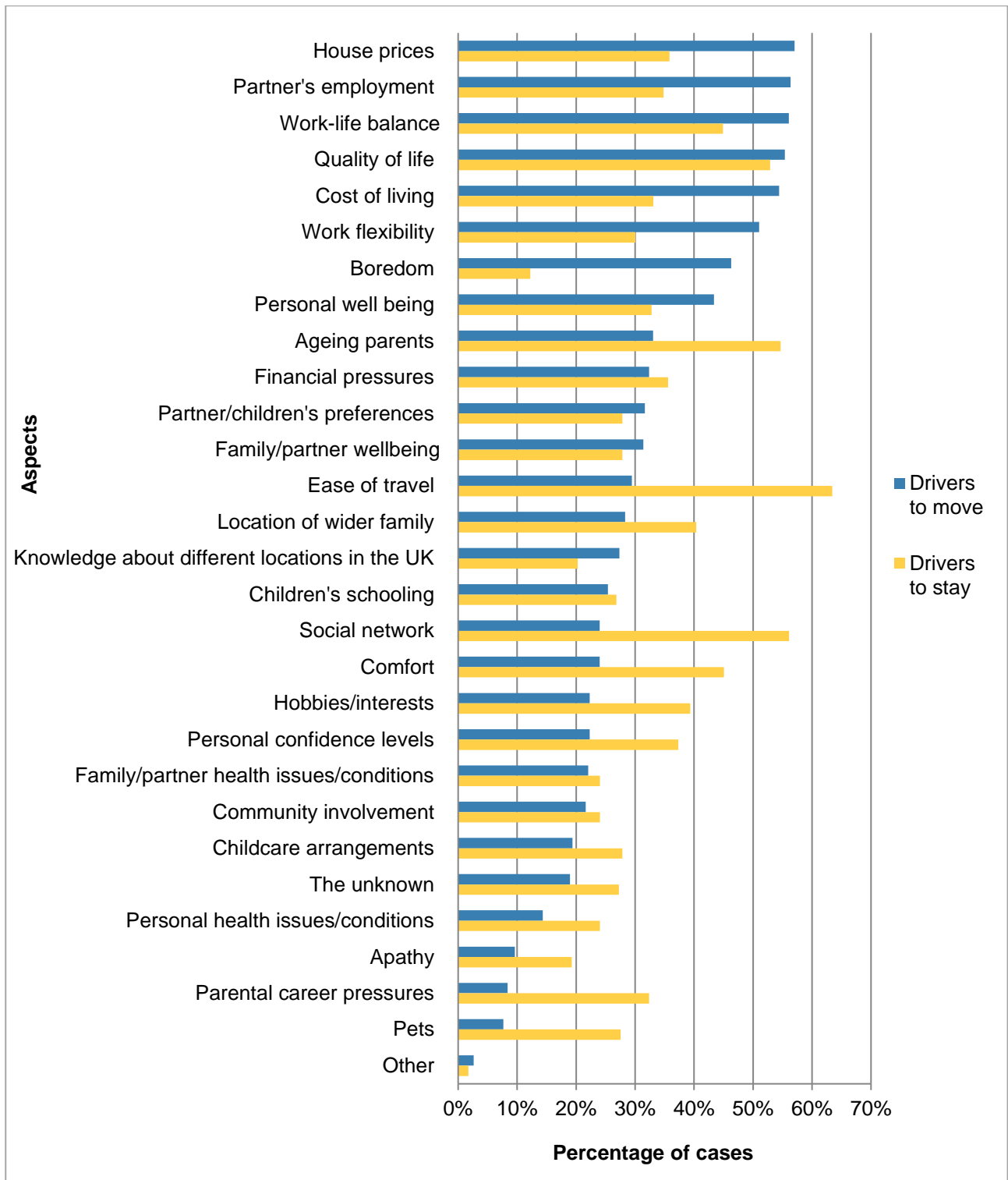
- Thirty-eight per cent would consider anywhere in Wales, although the South East and South West are clearly the preferred areas.

### 5.2.3 Non-work drivers

Pre-registration respondents were asked to identify all the non-work aspects that are driving them to move from their current location, or to stay. Figure 5.1 shows the percentage identifying every aspect as either a driver to move or to stay, and indicates that some aspects are strong drivers in either direction, while others are notably stronger as either a driver to move or a driver to stay.

- The five drivers to move identified by more than half of respondents are house prices, work-life balance, quality of life, cost of living and work flexibility.
- The four drivers to stay identified by more than half of respondents are ease of travel, social network, ageing parents and quality of life.

**Figure 5.1: Non-work drivers for pre-registration optometrists to move or stay**



## 5.3 GOC-registered optometrists

### 5.4 Existing location

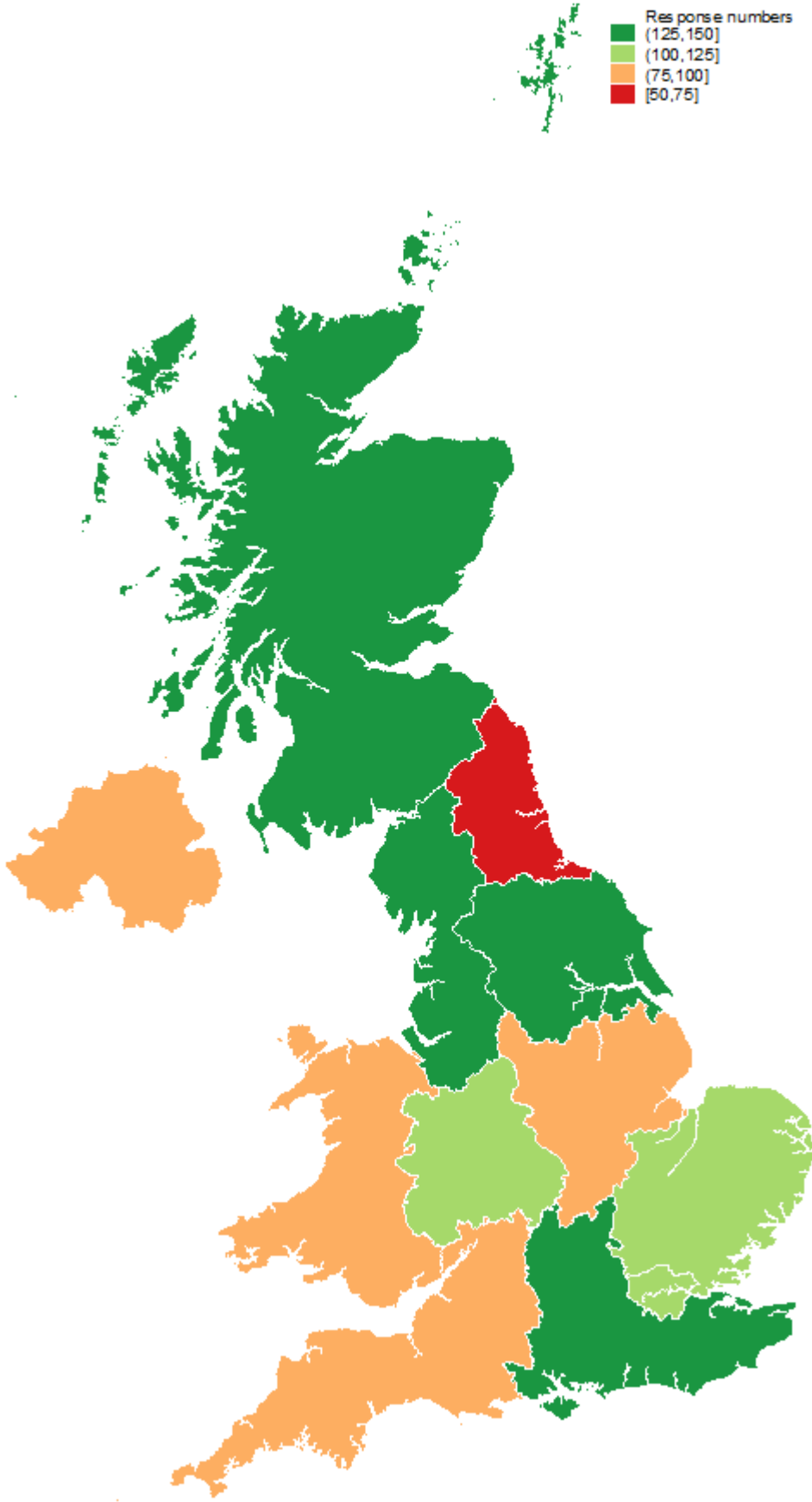
Figure 5.2 shows a map of the existing work locations of the GOC-registered optometrists who responded to the survey (using the locations for position 1). The analysis has been carried out at country level for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and region level for England.

For position 1, 72 per cent of respondents are based in England, 12 per cent in Scotland, nine per cent in Wales and eight per cent in Northern Ireland. Table 5.2, later in this chapter, gives a breakdown by regional area for England.

- Respondents were asked about the type of area where they work in position 1, and the results show that the majority live in an urban area with good transport links:
  - Urban area but not too busy, e.g. a town 41%
  - Mixed rural/urban area 30%
  - Densely populated urban area, e.g. a big city 28%
  - Predominantly rural area 11%
  - Geographically remote area 3%
  - Good local transport links 31%
  - Good transport links to rest of UK 24%
  - Requiring a car for reliable transport 24%
- Further analysis by geographical area shows that:
  - Respondents with a workplace in Wales are most likely to say they live in a predominantly rural or geographically remote area (28%)
  - Respondents based in Scotland are the most likely to say they live in a densely populated urban area (33%)
  - In both Scotland and Wales, a higher than average (but still small) percentage say they live in a geographically remote area (6% in both countries)
  - However, respondents based in Northern Ireland are the most likely to say they need a car for reliable transport (37%), followed by Wales (31%)
  - Respondents in Scotland are most likely to say they are based in an area with good local transport links (38%) while those in both England and Scotland have the highest percentage saying they have good transport links to the rest of the UK (24% in both countries).
- An analysis by gender and ethnicity indicates that:
  - There is very little difference in the type of area by gender
  - 43% of Asian/Asian British respondents are based in a densely-populated urban area, compared to 21% of White respondents

- 34% of White respondents live in a mixed urban/rural area, compared to 22% of Asian/Asian British respondents
- 14% of White respondents live in a predominantly rural area, compared to 3% of Asian/Asian British respondents
- White respondents are more likely to report being in an area requiring a car for reliable transport (28% compared to 14% of Asian/Asian British respondents).
- However, an analysis by age indicates that younger respondents aged 21 to 30 are particularly likely to live in a big city (42%) or a town (48%), those aged 51 and over are more likely than average to report working in a mixed urban/rural area (35%), and those aged 41 and over are more likely than average to report working in a predominantly rural area (14%).
- There is very little difference when the type of area is analysed by whether or not the respondents have any caring responsibilities.

Figure 5.2: Existing locations of GOC-registered optometry respondents

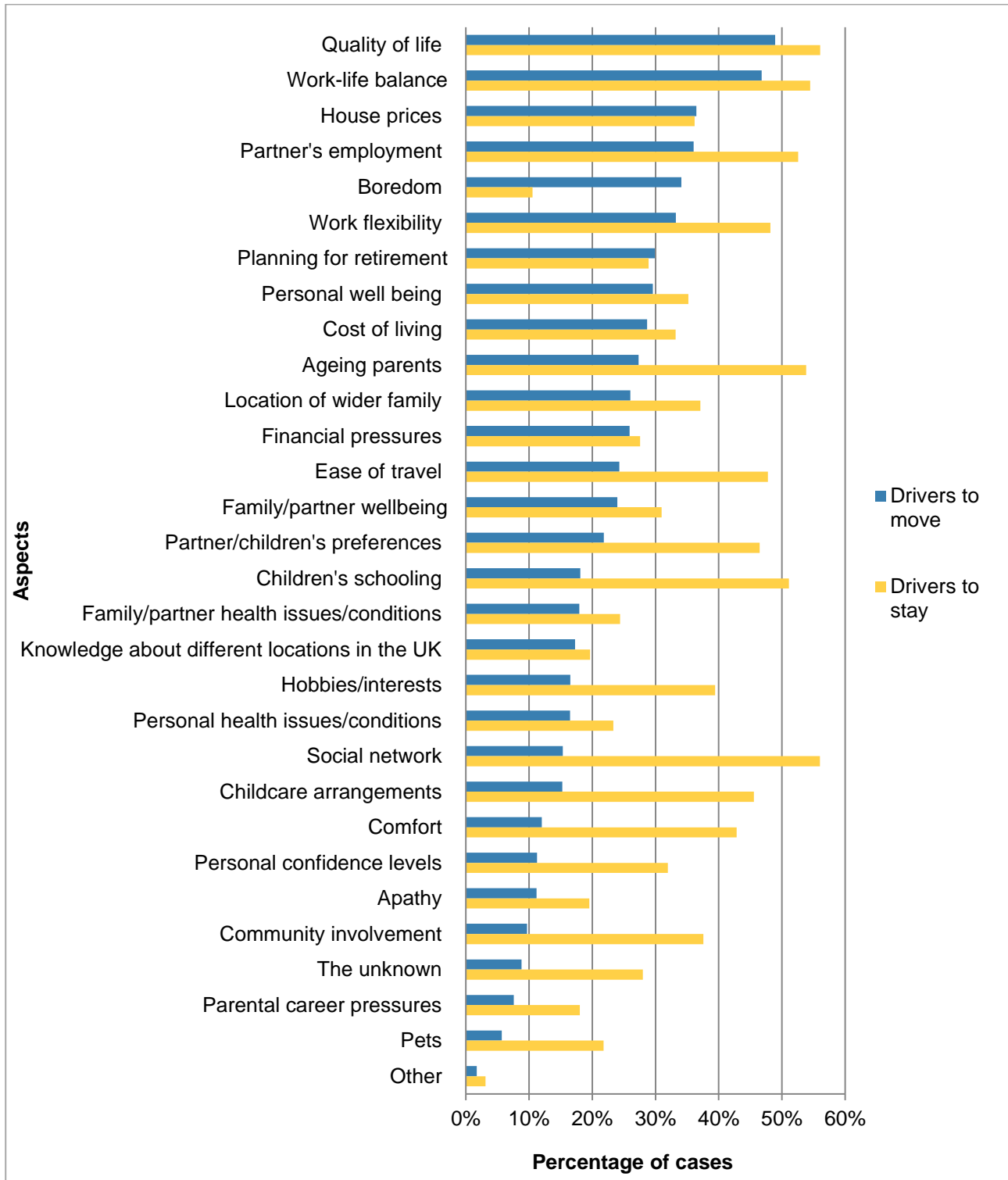


## 5.5 Drivers to move or stay

GOC-registered respondents were asked to identify all the non-work aspects that are driving them to move from their current location, or to stay. Figure 5.3 shows the percentage identifying every aspect as either a driver to move or to stay, and indicates that some aspects are strong drivers in either direction, while others are notably stronger as either a driver to move or a driver to stay. However, there is an imbalance between drivers to stay and drivers to leave, in that the drivers to stay appear to be much stronger:

- The six drivers to move identified by more than one-third of respondents are quality of life, work-life balance, house prices, partner's employment, boredom, and work flexibility. No driver has been identified by half or more respondents.
- By contrast, 17 drivers to stay have been identified by one-third or more respondents, and six of these are identified by over 50 per cent of respondents: social network, quality of life, work-life balance, ageing parents, and partner's employment, children's schooling.

**Figure 5.3: Non-work drivers for GOC-registered optometrists to move or stay**



Further analysis reveals some differences in the most important drivers among the various respondent groups:

**Drivers to move**

- Selecting only those aspects chosen by more than one-third of respondents, the top drivers for men are quality of life (52%), work-life balance (52%), boredom (34%) and

knowledge about different UK locations (34%). For women, the top drivers are partner's employment (43%), quality of life (47%), work-life balance (46%) house prices (38%) and boredom (34%).

- Selecting only those aspects chosen by 40 per cent or more respondents, for Asian/Asian British women the top drivers are quality of life (55%), work-life balance (53%), partner's employment (51%), house prices (51%), and work flexibility (44%). For Asian/Asian British men the top drivers are quality of life (55%), work-life balance (55%), boredom (45%), and cost of living (40%). White women identify quality of life (42%) and work-life balance (42%) as their top drivers, while White men also identify these as the top two drivers (49% and 44% respectively).
- As might be expected given their likely life stages, the drivers for different age groups vary somewhat. Selecting only those aspects chosen by 40 per cent or more respondents, those aged 21 to 30 opt for quality of life (58%), work-life balance (55%), house prices (51%), work flexibility (48%), partner's employment (47%), and boredom (43%). Those aged 31 to 40 identify quality of life (43%) and work-life balance (42%), and those aged 41 to 50 also opt for these two aspects (48% and 49% respectively). In the older age groups, the 51 to 60 year olds opt for quality of life (47%), work-life balance (41%) and planning for retirement (40%). Those aged 61 to 70 identify only one aspect, work-life balance (42%), while those aged 71 and over have a clear top driver, planning for retirement (81%).
- When analysed by responsibility for dependants, several differences surface. Again selecting only those aspects chosen by 40 per cent or more respondents, those caring for a child or children opt for work-life balance (45%) and quality of life (42%), while those with caring responsibilities for an adult identify six drivers: quality of life (68%), work-life balance (57%), planning for retirement (57%), partner/family well-being (52%), personal well-being (41%) and boredom (41%). Those with both forms of caring responsibility have three top drivers: work-life balance (44%), planning for retirement (42%) and cost of living (41%). Finally, those with no caring responsibilities identify three aspects: quality of life (53%), work-life balance (49%) and house prices (40%).

### Drivers to stay

- Selecting only those aspects chosen by more than half of respondents:
  - The top drivers for men are quality of life (58%), ageing parents (56%), work-life balance (55%), partner's employment (54%), social network (54%), partner/children's preferences (52%) and children's schooling (52%).
  - For women, the top drivers are social network (58%), quality of life (54%), work-life balance (54%), ageing parents (53%), partner's employment (52%), and children's schooling (51%).
- Selecting only those aspects chosen by 50 per cent or more respondents:
  - For Asian/Asian British women the top drivers are ageing parents (64%), ease of travel (54%), and social network (53%).



- For Asian/Asian British men, the top drivers are ageing parents (72%), children's schooling (65%), partner's employment (63%), childcare arrangements (59%), partner/children's preferences (57%), and social network (54%).
  - White women identify social network (60%), quality of life (60%), work-life balance (57%), partner's employment (55%), children's schooling (52%), and work flexibility (51%) as their top drivers.
  - White men identify quality of life (63%), work-life balance (60%), social network (55%), partner's employment (50%), and ageing parents (50%).
- Again as might be expected, the drivers for different age groups vary somewhat. Selecting only those aspects chosen by 50 per cent or more respondents:
- Those aged 21 to 30 opt for social network (55%), ageing parents (54%), and comfort (53%).
  - Those aged 31 to 40 identify far more aspects: children's schooling (65%), childcare arrangements (63%), social network (61%), quality of life (60%), work-life balance (60%), ageing parents (58%), partner's employment (58%), work flexibility (55%), ease of travel (54%), and partner/children's preferences (54%).
  - Those aged 41 to 50 opt for children's schooling (70%), quality of life (58%), partner's employment (56%), childcare arrangements (56%), ageing parents (55%), work-life balance (54%), social network (54%), partner/children's preferences (53%).
  - In the older age groups, the 51 to 60 year olds opt for quality of life (62%), work-life balance (59%), social network (54%), ageing parents (50%), and partner's employment (50%). Those aged 61 to 70 identify three aspects: planning for retirement (65%), quality of life (60%), and social network (58%), while those aged 71 and over opt for quality of life (64%), work-life balance (64%), and community involvement (58%).
- When analysed by responsibility for dependants, it is very clear that having such responsibilities leads respondents to identify a large number of strong drivers to stay. Selecting only those aspects chosen by 50 per cent or more respondents:
- Those with no caring responsibilities opt for only three aspects: social network (55%), quality of life (53%) and work-life balance (52%).
  - By contrast, those with caring responsibilities for a child or children select eight aspects, the clear top two of which are children's schooling (87%) and childcare arrangements (74%).
  - Those with adult care responsibilities select five aspects, with ageing parents (80%) clearly at the top.
  - Those with both forms of caring responsibility have no less than 16 drivers, with the clear top four being children's schooling (90%), ageing parents (80%), partner/children's preferences (75%), and work flexibility (73%).
- It is interesting to note that some respondents have identified some aspects as both drivers to move and drivers to stay. Aspects for which at least 20 respondents selected 'driver to move' and 'driver to stay' are:

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• Partner's employment	130 respondents selected both
• Quality of life	61
• Work-life balance	61
• Personal well-being	48
• Partner/children's preferences	45
• Children's schooling	41
• Work flexibility	40
• Well-being of family	40
• Childcare arrangements	34
• Partner/family well-being	31
• Financial pressures	29
• Personal well-being	26
• Personal health conditions/issues	26
• House prices	24
• Social network	22

## 5.6 Willingness to move for an ideal job

When asked if they would be prepared to move to another area of the UK for their ideal job, a relatively small percentage (17%) said yes, while 56 per cent prefer to stay in their current location and 28 per cent are unable to move.

Focusing on the relatively small number of people who would be willing to move and who provided further details of their preferences (around 200), further analysis was undertaken to find out where in the UK these respondents would be prepared to move to. The results are presented in Table 5.2 (please note that the current regional locations of respondents currently based in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are not given due to the small numbers involved).

**Table 5.2: Comparison between where pre-registration optometrists work now, compared to where they would be prepared to move (%) – only those who are willing and able to move**

Geographic area	Work now Position 1 %	Country/Region prepared to move to %
Northern Ireland - anywhere	6	69 (29 respondents)
Antrim and Newtownabbey		5
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon		8
Belfast		22
Causeway Coast and Glens		14
Derry and Strabane		3

Geographic area	Work now Position 1 %	Country/Region prepared to move to %
Fermanagh and Omagh		4
Lisburn and Castlereagh		7
Mid and East Antrim		2
Newry, Mourne and Down		5
North Down and Ards		2
Scotland - anywhere	10	50 (38 respondents)
Borders		14
Central		27
Dumfries and Galloway		5
Fife		7
Grampian		6
Highland		8
Lothian		15
Orkney		2
Strathclyde		17
Tayside		6
Western Isles		4
Wales - anywhere	5	46 (34 respondents)
North East		13
North West		11
Mid Wales		14
South East		32
South West		24
England - anywhere	77	31 (71 respondents)
East Midlands	6.5	13
East of England	12.5	12
London	11.5	30
North East	1.5	12
North West	10	19
South East	10	17
South West	6	29
West Midlands	11.5	19
Yorkshire and The Humber	9.5	16

Note: The percentages in the 'prepared to move to' column are expressed as the percentage of those willing and able to move to the UK country concerned, i.e. of those expressing a willingness to move to another location in Wales, 46% would go anywhere in Wales, 13% would go to North East Wales etc. Some respondents selected more than one area.

Table 5.2 suggests that, even for an ideal position, relatively few optometrists would be prepared to move. In addition, although some respondents express a willingness to move 'anywhere' within a particular UK country, others have preferences about the areas they would or would not move to. In England, London and the South West are the more

favoured destinations, while the East of England, the North East and the East Midlands are much less so. In Northern Ireland, Belfast is notably more favoured than other areas; in Scotland, there is a clear preference for Central, with the remote areas attracting a low response; and in Wales, the two areas in the South appear more favoured than Mid Wales or the two areas in the North.

■ Respondents who are willing and able to move for an ideal job were asked how long they would be prepared to spend on their daily commute (to and from their workplace added together) in this job. The maximum amount of time was 240 minutes, with a mean average of 65 minutes. The percentage breakdown is:

- Under 25 minutes            9%
- 25 to 44 minutes            20%
- 45 to 60 minutes            38%
- 61 to 89 minutes            5%
- 90 minutes and over        28%

### 5.6.1 Who is willing to move?

Overall, 57 per cent of GOC-registered respondents prefer to stay in their current location, 26 per cent are not able to move, an 17 per cent are willing to move. Further analysis by gender, ethnicity, age and responsibility for dependants shows that:

- Seventeen per cent of both men and women say they would be willing to move; however, 65 per cent of men express a preference to stay in their current location (compared to 51% of women) and 17 per cent of men say they are unable to move (compared to a much higher 32% of women).
- White respondents are more likely to express a preference for staying in their current location than Asian/Asian British respondents (60% compared to 52%), and White respondents are less likely to say they are willing to move (15% compared to 20% of Asian/Asian British respondents).
- As might be expected, having caring responsibilities makes a big difference to whether or not respondents feel willing and able to move. Only ten per cent of respondents with children are willing to move, compared to 24 per cent of those without children; and 37 per cent of respondents with children feel unable to move, compared to 15 per cent of those without children. However, caring for one or more adults makes less of a difference, in that 18 per cent of those with such responsibilities, compared to 19 per cent of those without, are willing to move.
- Those aged 21 to 30 are much more likely to say they are prepared to move than older respondents, although even in this age group, only 35 per cent are willing to move. Among those aged 31 to 50, 31 per cent of respondents are unable to move (compared to an average overall of 26%); and among those aged 51 and over, 68 per cent express a preference not to move (compared to an average overall of 57%).

In order to find out the characteristics of optometrists who are willing and able to move, a regression analysis was run with the outcome variable being a 'yes' or 'no' response to the question asking if the respondent would move elsewhere in the UK for his/her ideal position.

The predictor variables used in the regression model are age group, gender, whether the individual has a child, whether the individual is female and has a child, ethnicity, whether the individual has an impairment, total working hours, region (sub-country level), and whether the individual has a child and is a carer (N = 744).

The results show that, compared to those aged 41 to 50, holding all else constant those aged 51 to 60 are 2.5 times less likely to be willing to move, and those who are aged 61 to 70 are 7 times less likely to be willing to. However, those who are aged 21 to 30 are 1.6 times more likely to be willing to move than 41 to 50 year olds. Those with children are 2.6 times less likely to move, holding all else constant. Those who are currently based in Northern Ireland are 2.5 times more willing to move than individuals in the North West of England; this is the only regional group that has a significant difference from all others. Apart from this finding there is no significant geographical variation in willingness to move.

### **5.6.2 Are optometrists unusual with regard to willingness to move?**

There appears to be very little by way of published research on the topic of willingness to move in different professions, so it has not been possible to assess whether optometrists are less or more likely to move than those in similar professions, such as dentists, veterinary surgeons and pharmacists.

However, research published 15 years ago estimated the general willingness to move within Great Britain (Drinkwater, 2003)<sup>2</sup>. This research concluded that individuals in Great Britain were more willing to move from their neighbourhood in order to improve their living and/or working conditions than in many other countries (including the USA). However, there were differences by gender (with men being more willing to move than women) and age (with younger age groups being more willing to move than those aged 46 to 55 and over). In addition, those with additional qualifications, and those in non-manual occupations, were more willing to move than those without a degree and those in manual occupations. However, willingness to move decreases as the distance of the prospective move gets larger. The strongest relationship was between willingness to move and the length of time an individual had spent in a particular area, with those who had been in an area for seven or more years being notably less likely to be willing to move, and those who had moved in the previous three years being notably more willing to move. There was 'not a great desire' to move from the less prosperous parts of the country, probably because of the higher house prices in the more affluent areas. Finally, those living in a broad area described as 'the North' (North East, North West, Yorkshire and The Humber,

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<sup>2</sup> Drinkwater S (2003), *Estimating the willingness to move within Great Britain: Importance and implications*.

Wales and Scotland) were less willing to move than those in 'the South' (East and West Midlands, East of England, the South East, the South West, and London).

A more recent report published by a think tank called the Resolution Foundation, quoted in the Financial Times in 2017,<sup>3</sup> suggests that willingness to move is decreasing as time goes by. The article, referring to the report, states that the share of people who move region and employer each year has dropped from about 0.8 to 0.6 per cent of the UK population since 2000, and that this trend is not unique to Britain; the proportion of Americans who move between states, for example, has halved since the 1980s to about 1.5 per cent. The Resolution Foundation found that the share of people under 35 moving regions and changing jobs in Britain has fallen by 20 per cent since the millennium, and states that this finding tallies with evidence that young people in Britain has become more risk averse in the jobs market than previous generations. The article also quotes a statistic stating that only four per cent of people born in the mid-1980s moved jobs from year to year when they were in their mid-20s, regardless of whether that involved a geographical move, and that this represents half the rate of those born a decade before them.

This general evidence about willingness to move would seem to indicate that the AOP survey finding that relatively few respondents are willing to relocate, even for an ideal job, is not unusual. In addition, the greater willingness of younger respondents to move is consistent with Drinkwater's 2003 research. A key finding of Drinkwater's research – that willingness to move decreases significantly once an individual has been living on an area for seven years or more – suggests that students who opt for a university near home, and pre-registration optometrists who chose their position because it is close to home, will be unlikely to move in the future, even for an ideal position. The research quoted in the Financial Times, around young people being increasingly unlikely to move or change jobs, further suggests that the willingness of optometrists to move to a different geographical area may lessen in future.

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<sup>3</sup> Financial Times (15 August 2017), 'Fewer people move between UK regions for work'.

## 6 Recruitment and retention: perspectives of managers and business owners

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This chapter focuses on the views about recruitment and retention of those who are responsible for making staffing decisions at their workplace. In total, 27 per cent of GOC-registered optometrists who responded to the survey said they had staffing responsibilities: of these, the majority (74%) are independent business owners, while ten per cent are joint venture partners/franchisees of a corporate chain, seven per cent are employed public sector managers, five per cent are employed private sector managers, and fewer than one per cent are managers in the charity sector. In addition, four per cent ticked 'other' when asked about their position; when asked to specify, free text responses were very varied, with 'director', 'partner' and 'self-employed' being the only responses appearing more than once.

- Men are notably more likely to be responsible for staffing decisions, in that 41 per cent of male GOC-registered respondents said they have such responsibilities, compared to 16 per cent of females.
- Despite the increasing numbers of those with Asian/Asian British ethnicity within the optometry profession, a relatively low 16 per cent of Asian/Asian British respondents say they have staffing responsibilities.

### 6.1 Recruitment issues

#### 6.1.1 Vacancies

- Slightly under one-quarter (23%) of those with staffing responsibilities report that they have one or more vacancies for optometrists at their workplace. Those who provided further details about the number of vacancies gave a number of between one and 15, with a mean average of 1.65 and a mode (most commonly-occurring value) of one; the full-time equivalent of these numbers was from under one to eight, with a mean average of 1.3.
  - Although the number of responding business owners/managers in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is small compared to England, it would appear that those in England and Wales are more likely to report vacancies: 27 per cent in England and Wales combined, compared to 11 per cent in Northern Ireland and Scotland combined.
  - An analysis of those reporting vacancies in England (with a caveat around small numbers in some regions) suggests that vacancies are notably higher than average in the East of England and South East regions (42% and 40% respectively report



one or more vacancies), and notably lower than average in the North East (17%), Yorkshire and the Humber (18%) and North West (21%) regions.

- An analysis of vacancies by type of area (urban, rural etc.) suggests that vacancies are particularly high when the workplace is situated in a predominantly rural area (47% report one or more vacancies) and higher than average in an area requiring a car for transport (32%), and notably lower than average in a densely populated area such as a city (11%) and a less busy urban area such as a town (15%).
- Vacancies are covered mainly by locums (53% report using locums for vacancy cover) and/or seeing fewer clients (42%). Overtime is also used; for nine per cent of respondents, this is paid overtime, while for 15 per cent it is unpaid. In addition, 14 per cent ticked 'other' when asked how their vacancies are being covered; when asked to specify, a wide variety of free text responses were given, including that locums were difficult to find and that the respondents themselves were covering.
  - The methods of covering for vacancies appear to vary somewhat depending on the type of owner/manager. In particular, independent business owners are more likely to cite 'seeing fewer clients' than JVPs/franchisees (41% compared to 25%), while JVPs/franchisees are much more likely to cite 'locums' than independent business owners (100% compared to 49%).
- When asked to provide some free text information about the impact of carrying vacancies, 51 business owners/managers replied.
  - The most common themes were difficulties in managing workload (22%), an increase in waiting times for customers, or waiting lists (16%), and a reduction in the number of patients, or practice income, or business growth (16%).
  - Other impacts described were: increased costs (e.g. hiring locums), inability to take time off (impacting on family life), having to spend time on recruitment which proved difficult, increased hours and stress, and a drop in the quality of work.

### 6.1.2 Recruitment

- When asked how easy or difficult it is to recruit newly-qualified optometrists, only ten per cent said it was easy or very easy, compared to 42 per cent who find it difficult or very difficult; the remaining 48 per cent opted for 'neither easy nor difficult'.
  - An analysis by the type of business owner/manager showed that JVPs and franchisees are most likely to find it difficult or very difficult, with 31 per cent opting for 'difficult' and 43 per cent 'very difficult'.
  - More than half of business owners/managers in the following countries/regions of the UK say it is difficult or very difficult to recruit newly-qualified optometrists: South West (68%), South East (62%), East of England (57%), Wales (53%), Yorkshire and the Humber (53%) and East Midlands (52%). By contrast, less than one quarter report it is difficult or very difficult in Northern Ireland (12%) and Scotland (22%).
  - An analysis by type of area (urban, rural etc.) indicates that it is particularly difficult or very difficult to recruit newly-qualified optometrists in a predominantly rural area



(69%), a geographically remote area (63%) and an area requiring a car for transport (51%), and notably less difficult than average in a densely populated area such as a city (22%).

- One reason for not being able to recruit newly qualified optometrists may be because less than one-quarter (22%) of business owners/managers offer pre-registration training; the responses of pre-registration optometrists who completed the survey indicate they are likely to stay with their pre-registration employer after completion of their training, sometimes due to being contracted to do so as a condition of their training.
  - The majority (71%) of JVPs/franchisees, and almost half (45%) of public sector managers offer pre-registration training, compared to 13 per cent of independent business owners.
  - When asked why they did not offer pre-registration positions, 270 people replied. The most common themes were: no room in the premises (50%); too time-consuming/labour-intensive or too much responsibility (20%), and the business being too small or having insufficient customers (13%). Additional reasons given by a small number of respondents include: no longer wanting to train after doing it in the past; being a sole trader so not having the resources; concerns about finances; believing that pre-registration optometrists would not stay in the job; risk to the customer; and inability to offer the required training.
  - Those who did offer pre-registration positions, however, reported benefits. Seventy-one people provided information about these benefits, with the most common themes being: keeping knowledge/the team fresh (22%); succession planning (21%); finding satisfaction in supervising and training (16%); 'giving back' to the next generation of optometrists/being of service to the profession (14%); and contributing towards securing the future generation of optometrists (11%). Other reasons given by a small number are that they stay for two years after qualifying; there are cost benefits; and it provides additional capacity.
- Business owners/managers were asked to identify the different methods they used to attract optometrists to their workplace. The results show that some practices/workplaces are prepared to invest significant resources (time and money) to fill their vacancies:
 

● Salary uplifts	55% of respondents
● Commitment to fund specific training/additional qualifications	47%
● Benefits uplifts	35%
● Purchase of new equipment	33%
● Financial assistance with relocation	17%
● Help to find a place to live	13%
● 'Golden hello' one-off payments	11%
● Other	15%

- 'Other' methods include being flexible about working patterns, offering good working conditions and job satisfaction, and increased test times.

- An analysis by the type of business owner/manager showed that independent business owners are much less likely to offer all the listed methods of attraction than JVPs/franchisees:

	Independent	JVP/franchisee
• Salary uplifts	47%	81%
• Commitment to fund training/additional qualifications	45%	60%
• Benefits uplifts	28%	66%
• Purchase of new equipment	34%	46%
• Financial assistance with relocation	10%	40%
• Help to find a place to live	13%	25%
• 'Golden hello' one-off payments	5%	37%

- An analysis of the type of method and its effectiveness suggests that the mostly highly rated methods are the purchase of new equipment (47% who use this method find it somewhat or very effective), benefits uplifts (43%) and commitment to fund training/qualifications (40%), while the lowest rated is help to find a place to live (68% who use this find it somewhat or very ineffective).
- When asked about the effectiveness of their efforts to attract optometrists, business owners/managers are on average positive: 37 per cent believe their efforts are very or somewhat effective, compared to 21 per cent who believe they are somewhat or very ineffective.
  - An analysis by the type of business owner/manager showed that public sector managers and JVPs/franchisees are notably more likely to rate their efforts as very or somewhat effective, compared to independent business owners (67%, 49% and 32% respectively).

## 6.2 Retention issues

- Once optometrists are recruited, it appears that respondents find it relatively easy to retain them; only 13 per cent report that it is difficult or very difficult, compared to 40 per cent who find it easy or very easy.
  - An analysis by the type of business owner/manager showed, however, that responses varied depending on the country/region of the UK. In the East of England region, a notably higher percentage of business owners/managers reported it was difficult or very difficult to retain optometrists (23%). Business owners/managers in East of England, London and Wales find it less easy than average (27%, 31% and 31% respectively find it easy or very easy). The region where the highest number of business owners/managers find it easy or very easy is the West Midlands, at 58 per cent.

- When analysed by type of area, it appears that predominantly rural locations find it hardest to retain optometrists, with 24 per cent of business owners/managers finding it difficult or very difficult, and 34 per cent finding it easy or very easy.
- Business owners/managers were asked to identify the different methods they used to retain optometrists. The results show that, as for the attractors described above, some practices/workplaces are putting significant resources into retaining their optometrists:
  - Salary uplifts linked to length of service 54%
  - Commitment to fund specific training/additional qualifications 42%
  - Purchase of new equipment 35%
  - Benefits uplifts linked to length of service 26%
  - Promotion after a specific period of service 14%
  - Agreement to give time to carry out advisory optical work 14%
  - One-off retention bonus payment after a specific time 8%
  - Other 18%
  - 'Other' methods include providing a good atmosphere, offering flexibility (hours, days and holidays), regular salary reviews and future partnership or ownership.
- When asked about the effectiveness of their efforts to retain optometrists, business owners/managers are on average positive: 37 per cent believe their efforts are very or somewhat effective, compared to 21 per cent who believe they are somewhat or very ineffective.

### 6.3 General views about recruitment and retention

When asked to share more information about anything they have done to attract, recruit and retain optometrists, 92 business owners/managers responded. However, many of the comments related to the question not being applicable, either because they have not needed to recruit or because they are the only optometrist in the practice. Those who gave information or opinions related to recruitment and retention mainly focused on the following themes:

- It is important to differentiate the employment offer when recruiting by emphasising the good aspects of the job, for example flexible working hours, competitive pay, some or all weekends off, up-to-date equipment, and good support for newly qualified optometrists.
- Several respondents also spoke of the need to foster a happy, respectful and positive working environment.
- Honesty about what the position involves is also important, for example the number of eye tests per day and the expected working pattern.
- For retention, a focus on the longer term can encourage optometrists to stay for a number of years; this comprises development opportunities including possible future partnership, paid time off to gain additional qualifications, and support and

further training to specialise in different areas (e.g. from private practice to NHS work). A small number said that taking on pre-registration optometrists could help recruitment and retention, although there was a risk they would not stay.

- However, some respondents spoke of the difficulties of recruiting good quality optometrists (i.e. experienced, with further qualifications), particularly in some parts of the country, and said that recruitment was expensive and that agencies and job advertisements sometimes yielded no responses; word of mouth could be just as effective.
- A small number of respondents said they only used locums, rather than trying to recruit to a permanent position, although even recruiting a locum could be difficult.

## 7 Optometrists' attitudes

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### 7.1 Overall views

All survey respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with 23 statements relating to working as an optometrist and the optometry profession more generally. The scale ranged from 'strongly disagree' (which scored 1) to 'strongly agree' (which scored 5). Table 7.1 gives the spread of responses overall (i.e. the percentage of respondents selecting each category of agreement or disagreement) and the mean average score for each statement. A score above 3.0 indicates agreement with the statement, and the higher the score, the stronger the level of agreement.

**Table 7.1: Respondents' attitudes – spread and mean scores**

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		Total	Mean
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
<b>Positively-worded statements</b>												
Working as an optometrist is interesting	35	1.6	116	5.3	203	9.2	1,148	52.1	699	31.8	2,201	4.07
Optometry is a high-status occupation	91	4.1	373	17.0	612	27.9	903	41.1	218	9.9	2,197	3.36
Optometrists are beneficial to society	8	0.4	11	0.5	96	4.4	1,023	46.5	1062	48.3	2,200	4.42
Working as an optometrist gives personal satisfaction	52	2.4	89	4.0	276	12.5	1,097	49.8	689	31.3	2,203	4.04
Working as an optometrist is rewarding financially	84	3.8	309	14.1	581	26.5	1,062	48.4	160	7.3	2,196	3.41
There are many opportunities to advance one's career in optometry	130	5.9	397	18.1	581	26.5	833	37.9	256	11.6	2,197	3.31
Optometric work is meaningful	15	0.7	57	2.6	231	10.5	1,273	57.7	628	28.5	2,204	4.11
Working as an optometrist is rewarding in the non-financial sense	34	1.5	61	2.8	289	13.2	1,223	55.6	590	26.9	2,197	4.04
Optometry gives business opportunities	42	1.9	170	7.8	615	28.1	1,085	49.7	273	12.5	2,185	3.63
Working as an optometrist gives job satisfaction	53	2.4	136	6.2	354	16.2	1,225	56.1	416	19.0	2,184	3.83
Working as an optometrist gives good work-life balance	46	2.1	177	8.1	532	24.3	1,133	51.7	301	13.8	2,189	3.67
There are many opportunities for part-time working in optometry	33	1.5	94	4.3	327	14.9	1,064	48.6	672	30.7	2,190	4.03
It is easy to work flexible hours in optometry	117	5.4	326	15.0	560	25.7	802	36.7	377	17.3	2,182	3.46
There are many opportunities for locum work in optometry	19	0.9	67	3.1	606	28.1	1,038	48.1	425	19.7	2,155	3.83

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		Total	Mean
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
<b>Negatively-worded statements</b>												
Optometry is a stressful profession	28	1.3	186	8.4	474	21.5	929	42.2	585	26.6	2,202	3.84
Optometry lacks a clearly-defined career path	187	8.6	579	26.6	610	28.0	563	25.8	242	11.1	2,181	3.04
Optometry work can be repetitive	22	1.0	130	5.9	285	13.0	1,115	50.9	639	29.2	2,191	4.01
The public do not really understand what an optometrist does	21	0.9	167	7.6	399	18.2	990	45.1	616	28.1	2,193	3.92
Optometry is not what I expected when I enrolled on my degree course	303	13.8	748	34.1	489	22.3	441	20.1	210	9.6	2,191	2.77
There is a tension between the business imperative and helping clients in optometry	31	1.4	146	6.7	392	17.9	801	36.7	814	37.3	2,184	4.02
Recruitment problems seem to be increasing in the profession	74	3.4	262	12.2	1,030	48.1	524	24.5	251	11.7	2,141	3.29
It is difficult to retain experienced optometrists	41	2.0	262	12.4	1,101	52.1	504	23.9	204	9.7	2,112	3.27
Universities are not offering enough undergraduate places to meet the demand for optometrists	711	33.1	624	29.0	694	32.3	84	3.9	37	1.7	2,150	2.12

Fourteen of the statements are positively-worded, meaning that the higher the score, the more positive respondents are overall:

*Working as an optometrist is interesting*

*Optometry is a high-status occupation*

*Optometrists are beneficial to society*

*Working as an optometrist gives personal satisfaction*

*Working as an optometrist is rewarding financially*

*There are many opportunities to advance one's career in optometry*

*Optometric work is meaningful*

*Working as an optometrist is rewarding in the non-financial sense*

*Optometry gives business opportunities*

*Working as an optometrist gives job satisfaction*

*Working as an optometrist gives good work-life balance*

*There are many opportunities for part-time working in optometry*

*It is easy to work flexible hours in optometry*

*There are many opportunities for locum work in optometry*

Nine of the statements are negatively-worded, meaning that high scores indicate that respondents do not feel positive about these aspects, and/or these aspects are a cause of concern to them:

*Optometry is a stressful profession*

*Optometry lacks a clearly-defined career path*

*Optometry work can be repetitive*

*The public do not really understand what an optometrist does*

*Optometry is not what I expected when I enrolled on my degree course*

*There is a tension between the business imperative and helping clients in optometry*

*Recruitment problems seem to be increasing in the profession*

*It is difficult to retain experienced optometrists*

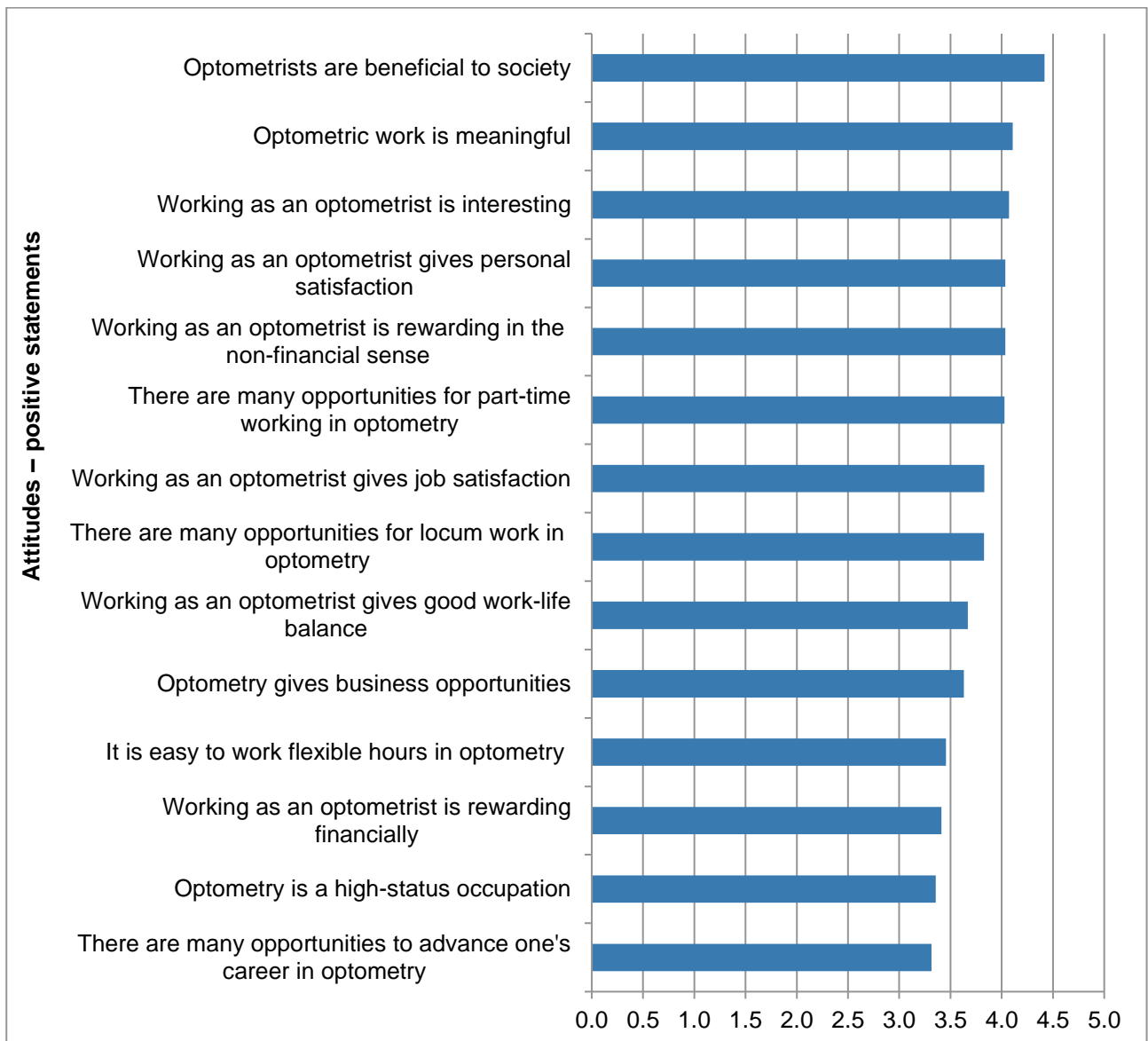
*Universities are not offering enough undergraduate places to meet the demand for optometrists*

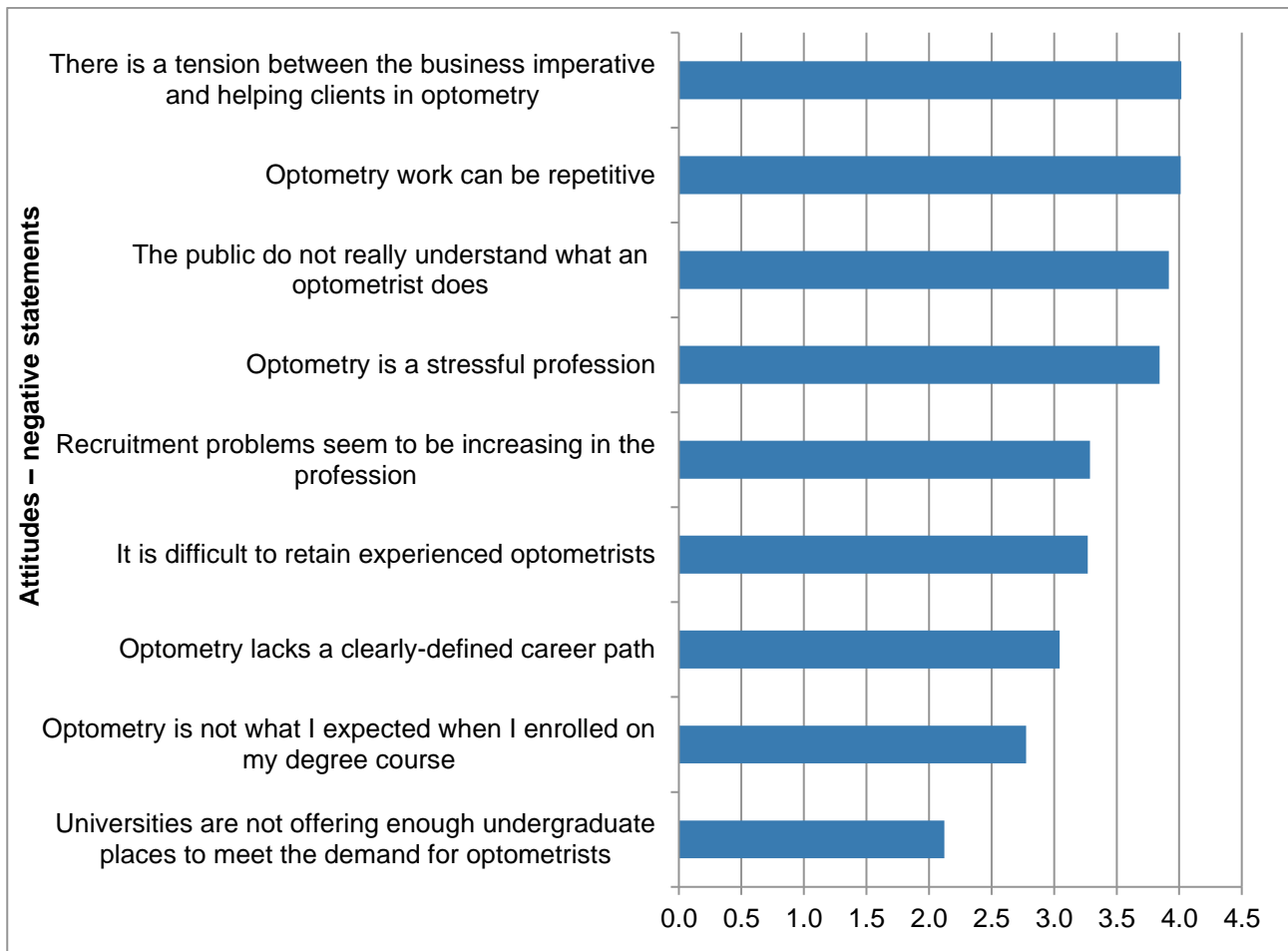
Figure 7.1 and Figure 7.2 present the mean scores in a bar chart, separately for the positively- and negatively-worded statements, and show that respondents are particularly



positive about optometrists being beneficial to society, and doing meaningful work that is interesting, gives personal satisfaction and is rewarding in the non-financial sense. However, there is also strong agreement that there is a tension in optometry between the business imperative and helping clients, and that the work can be repetitive; but respondents disagree that optometry is not what they expected when they enrolled on their degree courses, and disagree quite strongly that universities are not offering enough places to meet the demand.

**Figure 7.1: Mean scores for positively-worded statements**



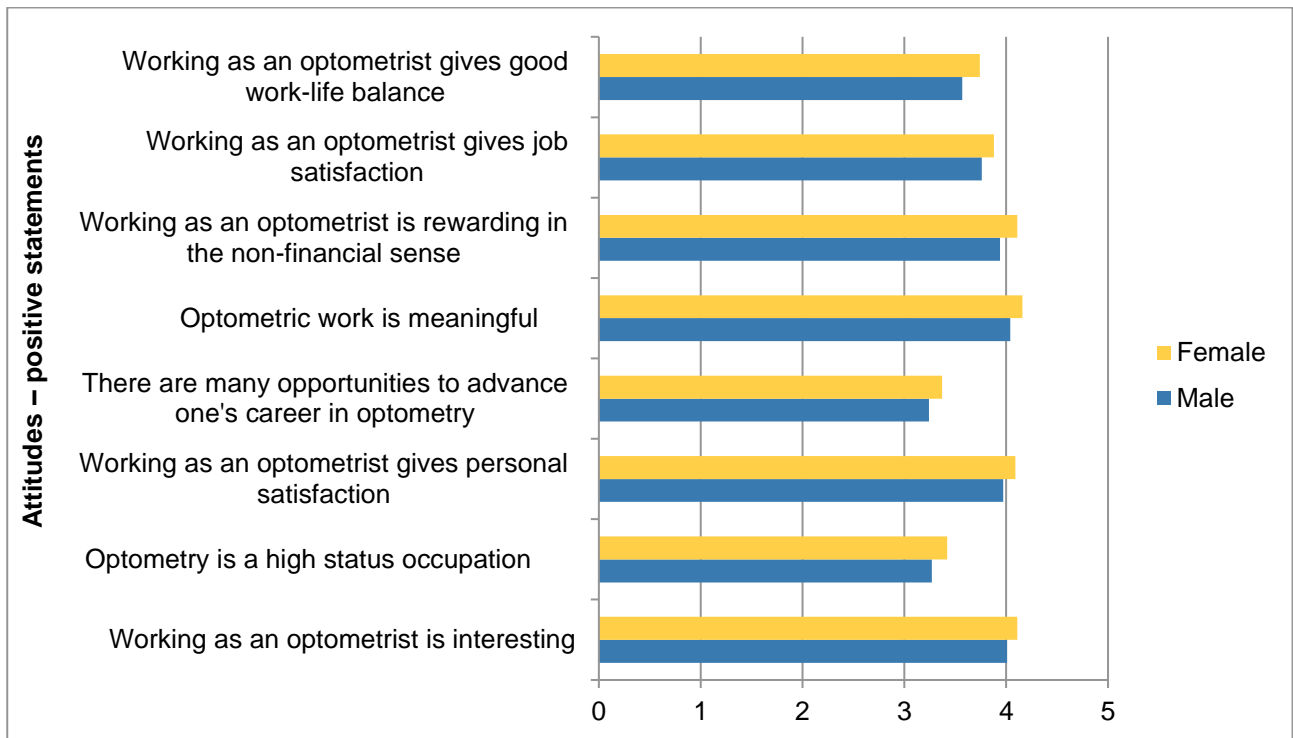
**Figure 7.2: Mean scores for negatively-worded statements**

## 7.2 Differences in views

Further analysis indicates some interesting differences in respondent groups.

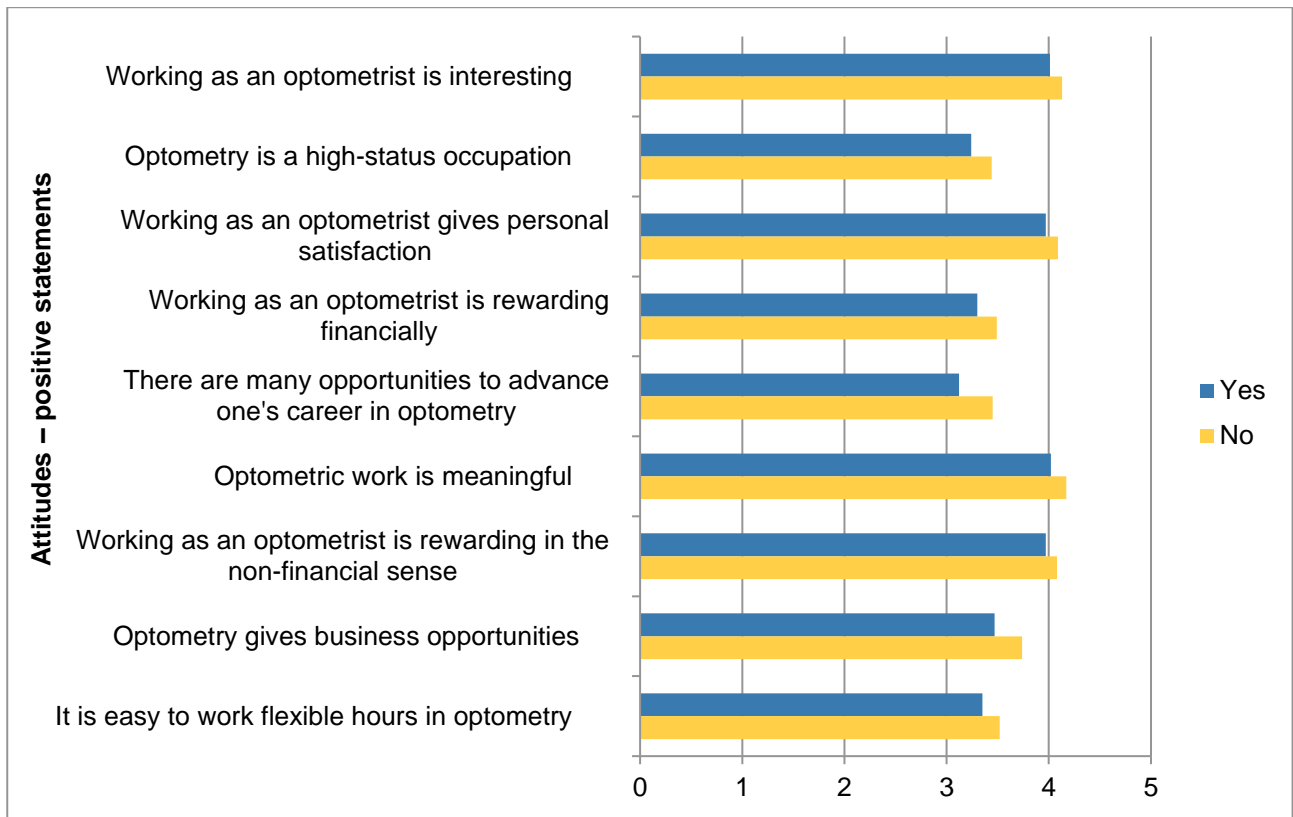
- In general, female respondents are more positive than their male counterparts (see Figure 7.3, which shows the aspects where there is the greatest difference between men and women).

**Figure 7.3: Mean scores showing difference between men and women**



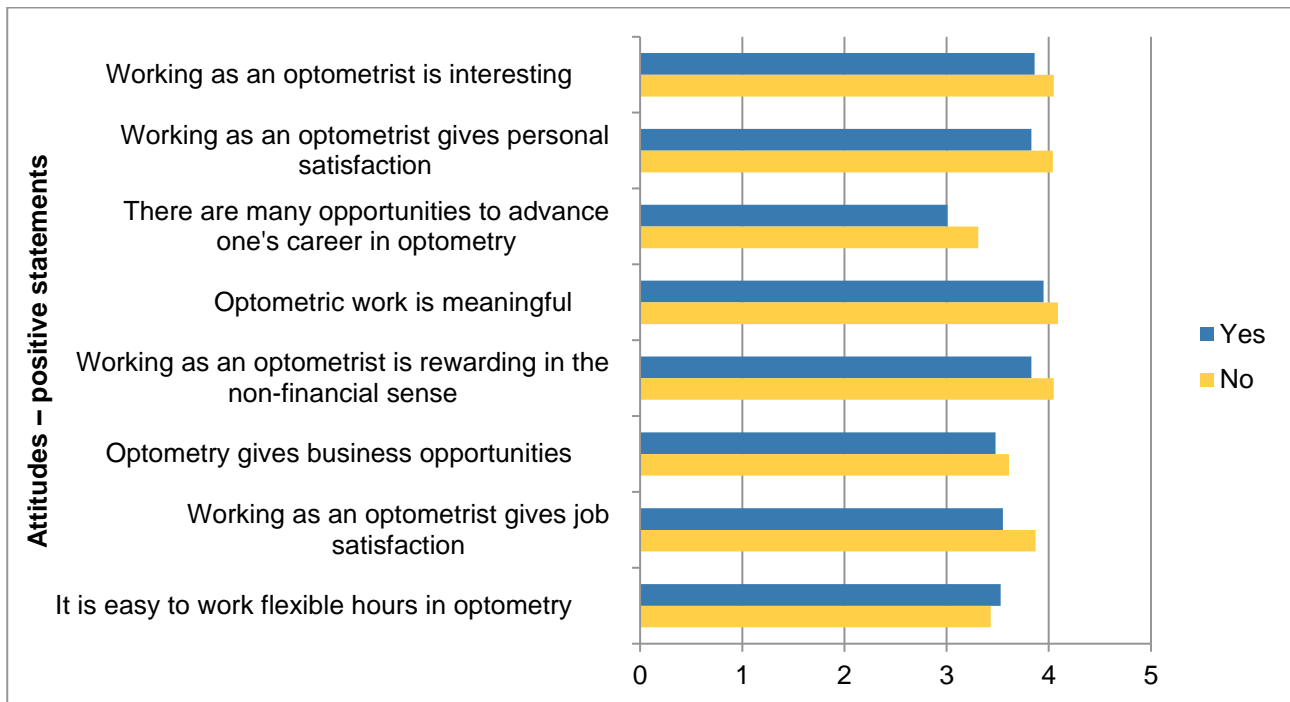
- An analysis by age group shows that the youngest age groups (those aged 30 and under, in particular those aged under 21 who are all students) and the older age groups (especially those aged 71 and over) are notably more positive than average; and those in mid-career (the 31 to 40 age group and particularly those aged 41 to 50) are less positive than average.
- There is no consistent pattern by ethnicity, apart from a tendency for White males to be less positive than average about most aspects (whereas White females tend to be generally more positive than average).
- Those with caring responsibilities (for children, adults or both) tend to be less positive than those without such responsibilities (see Figure 7.4, which shows aspects with the greatest difference).

**Figure 7.4: Mean scores by caring responsibilities (yes/no)**

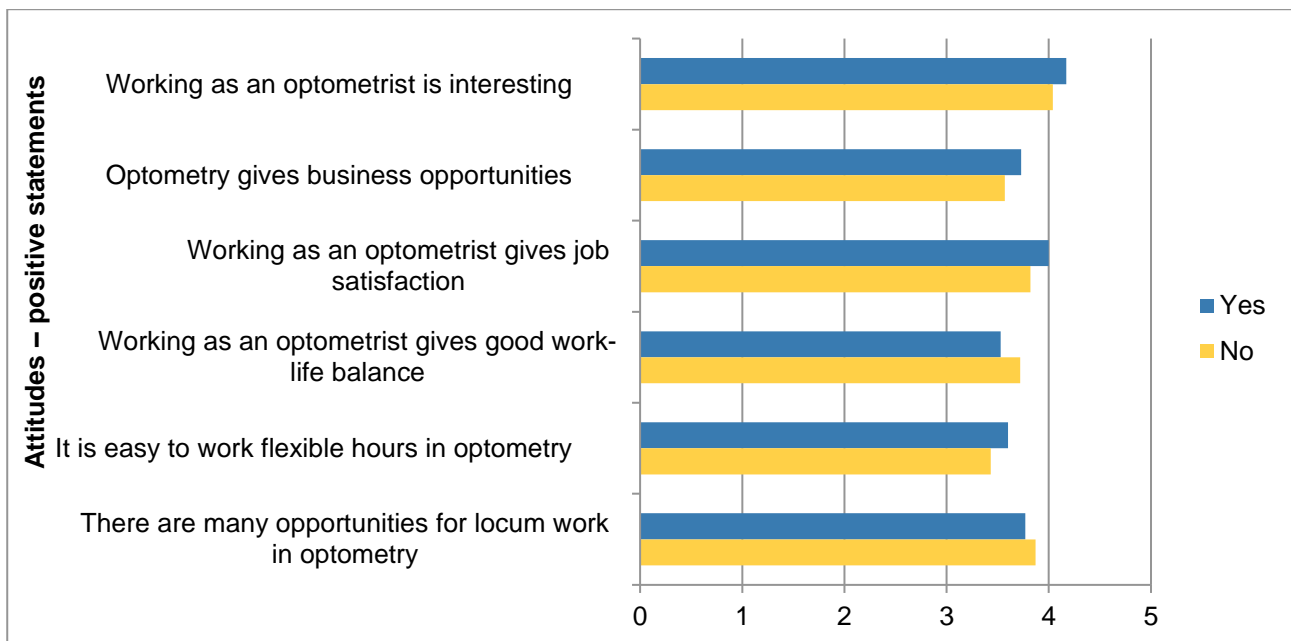


- Respondents who work solely as locums tend to be less positive, on the whole, than those who do not (see Figure 7.5, which shows aspects with the greatest difference). This may be partly due to the age effect, in that locums tend to be in the 31 to 50 age groups.

**Figure 7.5: Work solely as a locum (yes/no)**



- Those who say they are unable to move to a different part of the UK are, on average, less positive about most aspects than those who prefer to stay in their current location and those who are willing to move for an ideal job.
- Among GOC-registered respondents, those with responsibility for staffing decisions (business owners, JVPs/franchisees, and paid managers in the private, public or charitable sectors) are notably more positive than those without such responsibilities (see Figure 7.6, which shows aspects with the greatest difference).
  - Further analysis suggests that within this group, business owners and paid managers in the private sector tend to be more positive than average.

**Figure 7.6: Responsible for staffing decisions (yes/no)**

## 7.3 Views about being an optometrist

### 7.3.1 Best things

Respondents were invited to give free text responses to a question asking them about the best thing about being an optometrist. These responses were analysed to give the following list:

#### 1. Being able to help people (147 responses)

*Interaction with patients and knowing you have used your experience and skills well when you successfully manage a serious condition.*

*The smile on people's faces when they "can see", the reward when they say, "these are my best glasses ever", or the face lighting up on the old person in the wheelchair that uses a magnifier for the first time to read the newspaper again.*

*If you like to help people then it's a great job.*

*Getting feedback from referrals and seeing you have done your job right. Feedback from patients who are happy.*

#### 2. Flexibility (31)

*Moving to different areas of the country is easy compared with other professions*

*Flexibility ... you make what you can of your own career.*

*The flexibility/ability to work as a locum*

3. Engaging with people (29)

*Talking to patients*

*Meeting lots of people*

*Being able to work with different people every day... you get to work with all genders, ages and races to improve something in their life.*

4. Job satisfaction (29)

*Getting feedback from referrals and seeing you have done your job right. Feedback from patients who are happy.*

*The satisfaction you get after seeing patients for even simple things like dry eyes, where it makes a significant improvement in a patient's life.*

*I feel job satisfaction for what I do and enjoy my career immensely*

5. Pay (15)

*... an above average income*

*Decent pay and respectable status*

6. Variety/interest (13)

*I am lucky and work in a cool practice that offers huge variety*

*Interesting and challenging work. I enjoy being able to use my specialised skills to solve others people's vision problems. I like the expertise of the job*

7. Work-life balance (11)

*Currently, my Work/Life balance. I'm very happy in life & in my work.*

*Opportunities for meaningful part time work. Good for working mums.*

8. Being able to work in different clinical, professional and teaching areas (5)

*Can work in different fields - all related to Optometry e.g. teaching, managing etc. Doesn't just have to be in clinic*

9. Customer satisfaction (5)

*When patients always come back to see me regularly which shows they trust me*

### 7.3.2 Things in need of improvement

Respondents were invited to give free text responses to a question asking them about the things about being an optometrist that were in need of improvement. These responses were analysed to give the following 'top ten' list:

1. Pay is too low (46 responses)

*Pay packets and benefits*

*Salaries are on the lower side compared to other health/medical roles*

*Optometry has become so devalued by the public to the point that they frequently expect us to work for less than minimum wage.*

2. Commercial/sales pressure is too high and is increasing (41)

*Removing sales and target pressure that comes with working in a retail environment ... Having professional staff to assist during clinics not just optical assistants who push sales and products i.e. contact lenses to people who may not be suitable*

*I hear about the restraints put on some employed optometrists with great concern; for an ex pre-reg student I was asked about her 'conversion rate'. That saddens me.*

3. Public perception of the profession: it is faulty and optometrists are not valued (38)

*Much more of a push needs to be made to promote the profession - I don't think half the public appreciate fully what the role of an optometrist is*

*Thanks to the proliferation of commercial companies selling themselves as the place to buy specs cheaply, the public doesn't understand our health care role. I often see patients who've had an eye condition that an optometrist could resolve, who've been to the chemist 2 or 3 times, then to the GP ... who finally referred them to the eye hospital. Months of unnecessary discomfort for the patient, huge costs for the NHS and because they've always believed that their opticians are there solely for when they want to save on the cost of new specs.*

4. More is needed by way of clinical recognition, content, links to hospital and NHS optometry (18)

*Improve the status of optometrists within the medical profession*

*Better links to the hospital and more support from ophthalmologists.*

5. The career pathway/progression is limited (17)

*I do worry about future career prospects, with so many more universities offering the course and the inventions coming about that could replace optometrists*

*Better information on career pathways*

6. Stress levels are too high and work-life balance could be improved (12)

*Stress caused by time/clinic management. A minimum sight examination period for a GOS claim would be a positive step*

*Can be stressful, mainly with time management, with patients often needing longer than allocated appointment times. If they have issues, being expected to squeeze in emergencies to already busy clinics*

7. NHS fees for eye sight tests are too low and should be higher (10)

*Sight test fee by the NHS either should be £75 or should be taken away completely. It's pointless at present ... Everybody loses money on it.*



*Increase the price of the sight test so optometrists are more valued by the public.*

8. Flexibility in working patterns should be improved (8)

*More job flexibility to work around childcare/school holidays*

9. Paperwork/practice systems are too demanding in terms of time (7)

*Lot of pressure at amount of tests/info/recording advice that needs to be done ... in this ever increasing legal world.*

10. More time is needed with patients (7)

*More time for seeing patients. 30 minutes ideally. Or 25 minutes for all patients under 40, 30 minutes for all patients over 40.*

## 7.4 Would you do it again?

Respondents were asked whether they would still choose optometry if they could start their career again. Overall, 48 per cent say yes, 26 per cent say no, and 26 per cent are unsure. Further analysis shows that:

- Female respondents are more positive than their male counterparts, in that 51 per cent of women say yes compared to 44 per cent of men, and 23 per cent say no compared to 32 per cent of men.
- Students and pre-registration respondents are, unsurprisingly, much more positive than average: 81 per cent of students and 62 per cent of pre-registration optometrists say yes, with only four per cent of students and 19 per cent of pre-registration optometrists saying no.
- White males are the least likely group to say yes (38%, compared to 46% of Asian/Asian British men, 53% of White females and 50% of Asian/Asian females).
- The least positive age groups are those aged 31 to 40 (39% say yes) and 41 to 50 (40%), while the most positive are those aged 71 and over (84%) and under 21 (79%).
- Those with caring responsibilities are notably less likely to say yes than those without such responsibilities (40% compared to 54%).
- Those who prefer to stay in their current location are more likely to say yes than those who are not able to move or those who are prepared to move (49%, 38% and 43% respectively).
- Respondents with responsibility for staffing decisions are more likely to say yes than those without such responsibilities (50% compared to 43%).
  - With this group, paid managers in the private sector and business owners are more likely to say yes than average (59% and 52%).

## 7.5 A last word...

Finally, respondents were asked to give free text responses relating to optometry as a profession and optometry careers. The responses given by five or more people were:

- Optometry is being devalued as a profession (19)

*Optometrists need to take back control of their profession, we are just refraction machines at the moment*

- Commercial/sales pressure is increasing (19)

*Optometry has unfortunately been hijacked by the multiples who are solely in it for money, but outwardly perceive themselves as caring entities*

*Multiple company managers should not be able to pressurise optometric staff into cutting corners and over prescribing purely to meet commercial targets*

- Optometry is rewarding (17)

*Optometry is rewarding, will continue to be rewarding, because it is centred on the well-being of people*

*Love the job*

- There is time/workload pressure and stress in the job (11)

*KPIs. Conversion rate. 20 minute test. 'Squeezing' into the diary. Referring to HES because you're not given the time to do the job properly. Daily, weekly, monthly sales targets. Regular Saturday and Sunday work. Clinics running to 7 or 8 pm. Half an hour breaks (often less because the clinic runs a little late)*

- Remuneration is too low (6)

*Optometrists are undervalued and the wage reflects this.*

- There are problems with the public's perception of optometry (5)

*Free/subsidised eye tests devalue the work*

## 8 Follow-up interviews

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### 8.1 Interview themes

Following the survey, 17 telephone interviews took place from July to September 2018. Participants had volunteered to take part in a follow up interview via a question on the survey, and provided their details for the IES research team to contact them directly. Interviewees were randomly selected from those who volunteered; however, the sample was designed to include a representative range of roles across the optometry profession.

All interviewees were asked about their views on the following themes:

- Why they chose a career in optometry
- How happy they were with their choice of optometry
- Where they were based and if they were likely to stay in this area for the foreseeable future
- Whether they were prepared to move around the UK to achieve their long term career plans
- Whether they would advise others to become optometrists
- The main challenges facing the optometry profession.

In addition, locums were asked:

- Why they chose to do only locum work
- Whether more optometrists were choosing to work only as a locum.

GOC-registered optometrists with staffing responsibilities were asked:

- About the methods employed for recruiting optometrists and any difficulties they had experienced with this.

Finally, all interviewees were given the opportunity to make additional comments.

### 8.2 Profile

- The final sample consisted of: two locums, five GOC-registered optometrists without staffing responsibilities, four GOC-registered optometrists with staffing responsibilities, three pre-registration optometrists and two optometry students.
- The year of registration with the GOC ranged from 1974 to 2014.
- The interviewees comprised four females and twelve males.

- Of the pre-registration and GOC-registered optometrists, six worked in independent practice, four in multiples and one in an NHS hospital. Three of these interviewees did additional voluntary work.
- Of the GOC-registered optometrists, two worked part-time and seven worked full-time.
- Interviewees were based across the UK including: the South East (4), South Wales (1), London (2), the North West (4), the East (1), the North East (1), Northern Ireland (1) and the South West (1), with the location not given for one interviewee.

## 8.3 Views

### 8.3.1 Optometry career

#### Why did you choose optometry?

There were four main reasons why interviewees chose a career in optometry. The most common reason was because they were unable to secure a university place for their first choice career in medicine. After interviewees had received their grades, they browsed other professions in the healthcare sector, where they came across optometry. In some cases, interviewees felt that optometry offered a better work/life balance than the other healthcare professions.

*'I was a failed medic. I think it was an interesting topic, very medically-oriented and very much 9 to 5 and fits in more with normal life.'*

Employed optometrist

Despite not having been able to pursue medicine, interviewees felt that optometry was a career that had a 'nice mix' of the difference sciences and would utilise their skills in this area.

*'My decision was made because I was trying to think of what I could do with my A levels, which were Maths, Physics and Biology. I discovered they fitted really well with optometry; it seemed ideal because I wanted to do something medical without actually being a doctor.'*

Optometrist, staffing responsibility

Several interviewees considered optometry because a family member or acquaintance recommended the profession to them. In some cases, they had been advised to take this career path because of shortages, making the profession a secure choice.

*'I thought I'd go into teaching, then a friend advised me to go into optics because there were good openings; optics had just been privatised and universities were struggling to fill their places.'*

Employed optometrist

Finally, several of the interviewees had experienced issues with their vision as a child, or within adulthood, which meant they had spent a lot of time dealing with optometrists. This fuelled an interest in the subject which shaped their career decision.

*'I was very short-sighted and was having the annual sight test since I was 4. Since I spent so much time in opticians I became interested in the subject area.'*

Student

### Are you happy with your choice of optometry?

Fifteen of the seventeen interviewees were happy, or very happy, with their choice of optometry. The most common reasons given for this were that:

- It is a sociable job which involves interacting with the public
- The role is fulfilling as they are providing care and 'helping people'
- It is an interesting profession, which enables them to be scientific and use high tech instruments
- It is a profession with many career opportunities.

*'I really like talking to people and I like the problem-solving aspect. It pays quite well and there are a lot of job opportunities – I still like it!'*

Employed optometrist

*'It's a really interesting profession with scope for sub-specialisms such as medical retina and glaucoma.'*

Employed optometrist

*'Very happy with optometry so far, it's very rewarding to help the public being able to see better. It's a fulfilling job and not stressful, you never have to take your work home with you.'*

Pre-registration trainee

*'Found it quite interesting so far, even when stuff is difficult it is still quite enjoyable. It's interesting because everyone has to have sight and use they it every day, so I find it interesting to find out how it works.'*

Student

The only interviewee who was clearly not happy reported that the profession was 'boring and repetitive' with a lack of career progression:

*'I'd have preferred any job where there was more chance of career progression. Optometry is boring and repetitive; optometrists these days are 'refraction machines'. It used to be a bit more varied but even when I was starting out, it was getting this way. Unless you're running your own shop or own your own business, you just do a specific clinical role. There's very little variety.'*

Locum

### Why did you choose to be a locum?

The two locum interviewees were asked for their thoughts about locum work. When asked if more optometrists were choosing locum work, both thought that this was the case. They believed that this was because big firms were treating optometrists badly, which resulted in them being overworked and underpaid. Additionally, they perceived that locum work was more interesting and financially rewarding.

Both locums were working part-time at an independent optician. For one locum in particular, moving to an independent practice was an active decision after spending many years working in multiples. This interviewee had become concerned about the working practices in the multiples environment and the risk to optometrists as professionals.

*'When I last worked as a locum for [a multiple], I found the support staff there, who weren't GOC registered, were dispensing glasses for children without calling in an optometrist – this is illegal!'*

Locum

*'I spoke to an optom working for [a multiple] recently, who said her manager had actually told her to stack shelves in her spare time!'*

Locum

### Short term plans

The pre-registration and student interviewees were asked about their short term career plans. Two pre-registration interviewees commented that they were keen to build their clinical experience in the short term. However, they both had an interest in developing their knowledge and experience with acute and childhood eye conditions.

The two students were focused on 'getting through' their studies and pre-registration years without 'too many' problems. One student had already secured a pre-registration year and a full time job at a [multiple] branch in the North East, where he/she had worked as an optical assistant prior to university. This interviewee enjoyed working in a multiple environment because of being able to deal with a variety of different people; anecdotally he/she believed that in an independent you could only deal with 'about one person an hour'. The second student hoped to secure an eye hospital pre-registration position, but believed it was unlikely and 'statistically' he/she was most likely end up working for a multiple.

### Longer-term plans

All interviewees, apart from those with staffing responsibilities, were asked about their longer-term career plans in optometry.

Both locums believed that they were at a 'late stage' in their career and therefore did not have any long-term plans. However, being a locum enabled them to work flexibly so they could pursue their other interests outside optometry.

*'I'm always looking for something else to do. I'm working part-time so I can pursue other interests, but I need income so I can't give up being an optometrist. A lot of optometrists are like me, working as a locum part-time, because they want to do other things for interest.'*

Locum

The majority of employed optometrists without staffing responsibilities wanted to remain as they were, and did not have any aspirations to manage or own a practice. One was in the middle of doing further qualifications because of an interest in the subject. Only one interviewee aspired to buy and run his/her own practice, with the aim of gaining 'independence' from an employer.

*'At the moment I am happy but in the future I would like to buy into a practice and be more involved in the running of a practice... our opinion is asked for but I would like to have more of a say in the way that the business is run. Have a little bit more independence. And my time is limited.'*

Employed optometrist

All three pre-registration interviewees stated that they wanted to own their own independent practice.

*'I believe there will always be scope for the independent sector in optometry.'*

Pre-registration

### Achievement of career aims

Optometrists with staffing responsibilities were asked if they felt they had achieved their career aims. Whilst they felt that they had broadly met their career aims in terms of progression, all three interviewees commented that they had either just completed, or were going to complete, further qualifications which would contribute to them achieving their clinical career goals.

*'I'm currently looking into therapeutics, as I have a vision that refraction might become automated in the future, so optometry will develop into a more therapeutic profession. I've just completed a City and Guilds course in diabetic eye screening.'*

Optometrist, staffing responsibility

*'Yes, I have achieved a lot of things. I had been doing the fellowship for contact lenses and have finally completed this. Having children slowed things down a bit but I don't have anything more I would like to achieve at this point in my career. I have a long history with patients with complicated histories so have done interesting clinical work.'*

Optometrist, staffing responsibility

### 8.3.2 Recruitment of optometrists

The majority of interviewees with staffing responsibilities reported that they had found it difficult to recruit, either currently or in the past. Only one optometrist, the owner of an independent practice in the North West, reported not experiencing any issues with recruiting. However until recently, it was a 'one consulting room' practice so had not needed to recruit optometrists previously. The three practices (one multiple and two independents) that had found it difficult to recruit were based in the South East and East of England.

*'It's not too hard to retain staff, because we're good at looking after them – but recruiting, hell yes! It's hopeless getting people to come to East Anglia; we have to offer astronomical salaries, eg £50 to £55k.'*

Optometrist, staffing responsibility

#### Issues

Interviewees identified a number of issues that they believed contributed to their recruitment challenges.

#### ■ Location

- In coastal areas there is not 'a 360 degree draw of candidates', due to lack of 'landmass' so there were fewer large cities to draw upon.
- In more rural areas, it was felt that there was not much 'going on' for younger people.
- An interviewee in London observed that in his/her view, staff from some ethnic groups tended not to stay in the profession and felt this contributed to retention challenges.
- Generally, older workers did not wish to relocate.

#### ■ Misconception that independent practices were 'backwards' and lacked career development opportunities.

#### ■ A gender imbalance in the profession. It was observed that women represent '70% of the industry', but there is more pressure on women to take on the home keeping role so they tend to want to take on a part time role.

*'It's the area, there's not much going on for younger people in East Anglia. People come here to retire, so most of the population is under 16 or over 60. This makes it a fantastic place for a pre-reg to learn, if we can get them.'*

Optometrist, staffing responsibility

*'Yes, we have difficulty and it has meant we have started having to use recruitment consultants and agencies for their vacancies. When older colleagues are wanting to*



*retire we can't fill the spaces – generally more mature people don't want to relocate. We don't get many mature applications.'*

Optometrist, staffing responsibility

*'Last year, we had a full-time optometrist who was off sick for a while, then went on maternity leave; fortunately we had a pre-reg who could cover to some extent. This year, we haven't even been able to attract a pre-reg, even when we offered a salary that was almost as much as a full-time qualified optom would earn.'*

Optometrist, staffing responsibility

## Recruitment strategy

Interviewees reported getting little or no response from traditional job advertisements so considered them a 'complete waste of money'. Therefore, employers have had to turn to recruitment agencies and head-hunters, although these avenues tend to be expensive and perceived to also be ineffective. For one practice, based in East Anglia, recruitment challenges have led them to consider a implementing automated refractions and subsequently reducing the need for a highly qualified optometrist. This is not considered ideal, but they feel they are being 'forced into it'. The same practice has had to offer financial incentives to attract locums to their location.

*'We also use locums but they're hard to attract, too, and we have to offer financial support for accommodation and pay for their travel. This is why we look after our staff, once we have them!'*

Optometrist, staffing responsibility

*'We get little or no response from traditional job adverts now (eg Optom Today adverts). More candidates are using agencies to try and get a 'better deal' and 'protection' – agencies are actively headhunting, but they often miss-sell the job or candidate so there is a mismatch between the candidate and what we are actually looking for.'*

Optometrist, staffing responsibility

To mitigate some of the recruitment challenges, a practice based in London utilised its pre-registration training to develop a talent pipeline of qualified optometrists.

*'We have always been active trainers of optoms and dispensing opticians. We partner with Moorfield's so pre-regs get to see a variety of optom work. By providing the training we have an active supply of young professionals, and overall, people want to stay with the practice. Even three directors were all pre-regs.'*

Optometrist, staffing responsibility

An independent practice, who has not found recruiting difficult, finds that word of mouth works well for recruitment rather than advertisement. This interviewee believes that the reputation of the practice and the varied work on offer contribute to success in recruitment.

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*'In the area we sign up to other ancillary schemes – red eye, cataracts, lenses etc. We are directly opposite a large GP practice and get a lot of referrals from them. The work is quite varied, not just sight tests, and we have challenging patients.'*

Optometrist, staffing responsibility

## Retention

Due to the difficulties practices experienced recruiting optometrists, interviewees reported dedicating time and effort to 'looking after' and retaining their staff. A number of retention strategies were described, including:

- Partnering with hospital, thus increasing the variety of work
- Providing a clinically excellent working environment
- Reducing pressure on staff by not having sales targets
- Encouraging continual professional and personal development
- Encouraging an open door policy, so any questions can be answered immediately.

*'We do get disgruntled applications from those working in multiples that don't like the pressure on prescribing and number of appointments they have to achieve per day – want to have more freedom and working in an independent achieves that.'*

Optometrist, staffing responsibility

### 8.3.3 Geographical mobility

#### Remaining in their current location

Interviewees were asked if they were likely to remain in their current location for the foreseeable future. All of the locums and employed optometrists reported that they are likely to stay in the same location. There were two primary reasons for this: family commitments, and currently having a short travel time to work. However, two interviewees, living in the East of England and South Wales, would consider moving for the 'right opportunity' (although not to central London) or if they had an opportunity to buy their own practice.

Pre-registration interviewees were less committed to staying in the same location. Whilst 'ideally' they would like to stay in the same location, this was not a necessity. They may be prepared to move for the right position, which gave them 'what they wanted' from a job. However, the cost of living, the local community and their partner's opinion were raised as factors which would influence the decision of where to move.

*'I want to stay in the same area ideally, however for the right job there is no real limits to location at this point in time – however there would be other factors to consider, like my partner. I am not very salary driven, but would move for the right job which is focused on patient centred care and has a broad spectrum of things to do.'*

Pre-registration trainee

The two students had already decided to move 'home' after completing their university course. They were both reluctant to relocate due to family and social reasons. One of the students commented that if he/she were to move, it would be to a large town in the north as the cost of living is more affordable.

*'Yes, I see my career here [in the North East] unless someone gave me a good reason to go elsewhere – a good reason would be a step up in terms of seniority. But I would have to uproot my hobbies, which I don't want to do.'*

Student

### Moving for an ideal role

Interviewees were asked if they would move for an ideal role or to achieve their long term career plans. The majority of registered optometrists would not move around the UK. The main reasons for this decision being that they were either they were in a late stage of their career or they had family commitments tying them to the area. Only two registered optometrists (a locum and two employed), stated that *would* move for an ideal role. However, they would not consider living in London or a big city where cost of living is high or in the North or anywhere too rural.

*'No, mainly for the reasons stated [family don't want to move], but also because there are quite a lot of jobs in [this part of] London. I've seen some high salaries offered eg in [towns in the North of England], but I'm not at all sure I'd want to go there.'*

Employed optometrist

*'But no, I wouldn't want to move anywhere else, even for a dream job – it would have to be in this area [North West].'*

Employed optometrist

*'Yes, not up North though and only up to an hour to travel. I would be prepared to re-locate, depending on the place and the role.'*

Employed optometrist

*'Although I'd think about moving for an interesting hospital job (which isn't going to happen), I wouldn't live in London or anywhere else where housing is expensive, and I wouldn't want to work in a big city.'*

Locum

### 8.3.4 The profession

#### Recommending a career in optometry

When the GOC-registered interviewees were asked if they would advise others to consider a career in optometry, ten said they would recommend a career in optometry to others. The most common reasons given for recommending the profession were:

- It is a profession with varied work and many career options
- It provides a good work/life balance, especially for working mothers
- It is a sociable job with lots of interaction with the public.

*'In the world of healthcare it has a great balance and there are a lot options which people aren't aware of, for example, working alongside the College of Optometry and working with other professional bodies.'*

Pre-registration

*'There's a scientific base to the job, but it's a lovely mix of gadgets and people and routine. But you don't know these things when you're making a career choice though. It's a shock to most pre-regs that it is also a retail job... they've been taught how to fit glasses but not to sell them. To stay in business you have to sell glasses. It's this retail angle which is not stressed. There doesn't need to be any tension between retail and clinical.'*

Employed optometrist

*'Yes, I would definitely encourage this, especially as a female; you don't have to take work home, other women have to work to fit in their family life so it's important if you want a family.'*

Employed optometrist

*'Definitely. I've always loved it – it's an enjoyable, brilliant profession.'*

Optometrist, staffing responsibility

However, some interviewees offered a caveat that prospective optometrists must enjoy interacting with the public as it is a large part of the job.

*'I do enjoy my work... you have to be a people-person and you have to interact with people and trainees need to realise that.'*

Employed optometrist

*'Yes, if they really knew what the job is all about. I see a lot of young optometrists who say they don't like talking to people – but this is a really big part of the job. They have good qualifications and they're really clever, but they don't realise you have to talk to people. You need to know, also, that you'll have to work long hours and at weekends. You also have to commit to it; some people drift into it because they don't get into what they originally planned to do, eg they don't get the grades to do*

*medicine. Others are much more aware, in that they've had a Saturday job in an optician's or have relatives in the business. The drifters can flounder.'*

Employed optometrist

Two interviewees were unsure if they would recommend optometry. They felt that there is an increasing commercial pressure placed on optometrists, whilst the salaries have reduced. They were also sceptical of the rise of multiples, especially their increasing involvement in training pre-registration training.

*'I'm not sure. I hesitate because optometry has become too commercial for my liking, especially in the bigger, flagship stores – I'm lucky in that the shop where I work is small, I work with a nice team and because I've been there a long time, I know how to deflect some of the pressure. It hasn't always been so good, though. I had a bullying manager at one point who put me under a lot of pressure – I was very stressed and it threatened my health because I started to feel ill. So, I'd tell people to be careful and would warn them about the pressure and about the risk of getting a store manager who's bullying and controlling.'*

Employed optometrist

Only one interviewee, a locum, would not recommend a career in optometry. They thought the job was repetitive, boring and lacked career progression.

*'No, because of all the reasons I've outlined [repetitive nature of the work, boredom, lack of career progression, advance of the corporates]. I'm surprised that people with good A levels choose optometry rather than anything else. There are some advantages, though – you can walk away from the job at the end of the day, you can work part-time. And for women especially, it's easy to resume working after a career break.'*

Locum

Interviewees also observed that there is a general lack of understanding what the job entails, which could lead to someone embarking on an unsuitable career.

## Challenges facing the optometry profession

### *Competition and the rise of the multiples*

The majority of interviewees from independent practice thought that the dominating presence of multiples was challenging for the profession. Multiples were perceived to be very 'competitive' and 'cut throat', whereby independents were unable to compete. The growing online presence was also thought to be damaging, both for independent practices but also patient care. As the public are now readily able to optical buy products online, the necessary checks and spectacle fittings are not being performed.

*'The multiples are having increasingly more of a monopoly.'*

Pre-registration trainee

Interviewees felt that the fierce competition is leading to increased pressure on optometrists. Many optometrists believed that there is a large, and increasing, commercial focus to the role which has resulted in a decrease in emphasis on patient-centred care. Optometrists are being targeted and measured on their spectacle conversion rates and number of appointments achieved per day, which is perceived to contribute to the pressure.

*'Some of my friends' salaries are dependent on their conversion rate on selling glasses.'*

Pre-registration trainee

*'The main challenge is the marginalisation of the optometrist in corporates, where most of the eye tests are done these days – the small independents are fading away and mostly have an elderly clientele. The corporates are driven by business, they want to sell glasses because that's where the money is, so that's where they put their experienced staff. Optometrists are necessary for the corporates but they don't like us.'*

Locum

### ***The devaluing of the profession***

As result of the competitive and commercial strategy, the interviewees thought that multiples are contributing to the 'devaluing' of the profession. In particular, free eye tests and an emphasis on 'selling' are detrimentally affecting perceived value of optometrists.

*'On a high street level, multiples have a lot to answer for in the watering-down of things. I don't think the GOC should permit free exams.'*

Pre-registration trainee

*'It's the industry's fault because eye care is considered 'free' and people are not happy to pay for it. They don't see value.'*

Optometrist, staffing responsibilities

*'The NHS won't offer higher sight tests when multiples offer them for free – the public attach little or no value to a sight test because there is no cost attached to it. The public perception needs to change – should people be allowed to give sight tests for nothing?'*

Optometrist, staffing responsibilities

### ***Lack of understanding from general public***

A large number of interviewees identified that there is a general lack of understanding from the public about what optometrists do, which contributes to the 'devaluing' of the profession.

*'I think the main challenge is the public perception of what we do. The NHS is going down the route of separating refractions from clinical conditions testing; our patients come to us just for an eye test but don't always understand that we can spot other presenting problems. They might go to their GP with an eye problem, not understanding that an optometrist can assess and diagnose a problem better than a GP.'*

Employed optometrist

*'The main challenges are a lack of understanding from the general public about what we do. We are seen as spectacle sellers. The NHS eye exam perpetuates that. We don't get a decent sight test fee so the high street optometrists rely on sales. In Scotland this is different with higher test fees.'*

Employed optometrist

### **NHS funding**

Although there was not a specific interview question about this, many interviewees expressed the view that the NHS does not pay enough for eye-tests. Some interviewees gave examples of other countries that have 'better' models for eye care, such as the USA, Canada and Scotland, where more is charged for examinations. They believe that higher prices for eye-tests would enable optometrists to see fewer patients for longer appointments and perform more thorough examinations.

*'The amount of money you get paid by the NHS is too low – it costs £100 an hour to open our doors. We are losing money on NHS site tests. The Scottish way of doing things is better - everyone gets NHS tests and they all get a dilated test, but they get 50 quid for sight tests.'*

Optometrist, staffing responsibilities

*'The sight test fee is a problem because it's a loss leader, which means there's a focus on selling glasses and maybe even doing unnecessary tests that could be charged for. It would be better to have a more expensive eye examination and pay less for glasses; I think this happens in some other countries. It's not going to happen, though!'*

Employed optometrist

### **8.3.5 Other comments**

A number of other common points were raised by interviewees:

- There is a need to increase awareness of the profession at a grass-roots level:

*'How to you get people at school more interested/knowledge of the industry? We need to target careers advisers so they are informed about the job - the job isn't just specs, there is a medical/clinical aspect. From a careers point of view, people don't know what the industry is like, so educate them.'*

Optometrist, staffing responsibilities

■ Optometrists should embrace clinical work:

*'I think the profession needs to embrace more clinical work, because hospital eye departments are struggling to cope and optoms are capable of taking on more. It would be beneficial to us because it would mean less commercial pressure.'*

Employed optometrist

*'Optometrists need to move into paid consultancy/triage, to advise on things like sore eyes, and to look for possible causes when people report problems or are worried. Optoms can be really good at spotting things that might be serious, such as brain tumours affecting vision; we could then refer for a medical diagnosis. The only way we can do this now is via the eye test, when we often have a limited time – it's a bit ad hoc.'*

Locum

*'People will have to start using their clinical decision-making skills more broadly – instead of seeing an abnormality and refer it, make a decision and manage it.'*

Optometrist, staffing responsibilities

■ Technology is changing the nature of work:

*'Technology will change things, inevitably. Some parts of a healthy eye test might become automated, which could mean fewer optoms are needed as they'll just be interpreting the results; on the other hand, this could free up optoms' time to do more interesting investigative work.'*

Locum



## 9 Conclusions

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The AOP's 2018 survey of the optometry profession has collected a large amount of data about student optometrists, pre-registration optometrists and GOC-registered optometrists: their working lives, aspirations, career intentions and willingness or otherwise to relocate to another part of the UK in order to achieve these. In addition, business owners and employed managers have contributed their experiences of recruiting and retaining optometrists, and all respondents have offered their views about being an optometrist and about the optometry profession.

The report contains a considerable amount of detail, from which some clear main themes emerge:

- It is apparent that the profession is increasingly becoming female-dominated, in that 58 per cent of respondents are female; however, comparative data from similar professions (such as pharmacists, podiatrists, dentists and veterinary surgeons) suggests that the degree of 'feminisation' is less advanced in optometry than in most others.
- In addition, the ethnic mix of optometrists is changing fast, with 28 per cent of respondents being Asian/Asian British overall, and a higher percentage of respondents aged under 30 being Asian/British than White.
- An age breakdown of respondents suggests that the profession is reasonably well balanced, unlike some of the comparable professions which have high percentages either at the younger end of the age spectrum (e.g. psychologists) or older end (e.g. podiatrists).
- A large 27 per cent of GOC-registered optometrists who responded to the survey are working solely as locums. Various reasons are given for this choice, with the main reasons being flexibility, greater financial reward than being employed, and variety of work.
- It is clear from both the survey and the follow-up interviews that some business owners/employed managers are experiencing recruitment difficulties, with only ten per cent finding it easy or very easy to recruit newly-qualified optometrists. Difficulties are greater in the East of England, London and Wales, and are compounded for business owners/managers based in rural areas. The West Midlands appears to be the least problematic area with regard to recruitment. However, it is worth noting that only 23 per cent of business owners/managers responding to the survey reported one or more vacancies for optometrists at their workplace.
- Retention seems to be much less of an issue for business owners/managers, with only 13 per cent reporting that they found it difficult or very difficult to retain optometrists. Those based in East of England, London and Wales find it hardest, and again being in

a rural location seems to present a particular challenge. Again, the West Midlands seems to be the area in which business owners/managers find it easiest to retain optometrists.

- It seems unlikely that the recruitment (and to a much lesser extent retention) problems in some areas will ameliorate, as a relatively small 17 per cent of respondents said they would be prepared to move to another area of the UK for an ideal job; 56 per cent prefer to stay in their current location and a further 28 per cent feel unable to move. The interviews support this reluctance or inability to move. The most likely type of individual to be prepared to move is, unsurprisingly, in the 21 to 30 age group and without children. Optometrists are not unusual in not wanting to relocate; the survey findings appear to be consistent with a growing unwillingness to move identified within the published literature.
- When asked about non-work drivers to either move to another part of the UK or stay in their current area, it is apparent that drivers to stay are stronger than drivers to move. The top six drivers to stay are identified by over half of respondents: social network, quality of life, work-life balance, ageing parents, partner's employment and children's schooling. By contrast, none of the drivers to move are identified by half or more of respondents. The top six drivers to move, chosen by more than one-third of respondents (whereas 17 drivers to stay are identified by more than one-third), are quality of life, work-life balance, house prices, partner's employment, boredom, and work flexibility.
- It is clear, from the responses to attitude statements and the free text comments in the survey, and from the interviews, that optometrists feel there are challenges to the profession. Particular challenges identified are:
  - the profession is becoming devalued, pay being too low and both the general public and other health professionals not realising that optometrists could offer a lot more
  - optometrists are under increasing pressure to 'sell' glasses, contact lenses and additional tests, with the growing presence of the large corporate chains contributing to this pressure
  - the situation is exacerbated by the low NHS fee for sight tests, which also contributes to the general public's lack of awareness
  - because of the above issues, optometry work is becoming more stressful.
- Despite some anxieties about the challenges and the future of the profession, the majority of respondents to the survey are positive about being an optometrist. There is a high level of agreement to statements that optometrists are beneficial to society and that optometry work is meaningful, interesting and gives personal satisfaction.
- When asked if they would still opt for optometry if they could start their career again, a little under half (48%) say yes, with 26 per cent giving a clear 'no' and 26 per cent being unsure.
- However, the majority of interviewees say they would advise others to become an optometrist, albeit some with caveats. As one interview put it:

*'Definitely. I've always loved it – it's an enjoyable, brilliant profession!'*