



Optometry Wales Written Response to the Welsh Government response (January 2026) to the Health and Social Care Committee's report (November 2025) following the Inquiry into Ophthalmology Services in Wales.

Optometry Wales is the umbrella professional body for all community optometrists, dispensing opticians and optometric practices in Wales with our main function to represent the profession at all levels in Wales. Optometry Wales negotiates on behalf of the statutory bodies (the Regional Optical Committees) with the Welsh Government and NHS Wales in respect of national NHS services provided by optometry in primary care.

Optometry Wales is pleased to be invited by the Health and Social Care Committee to provide a written response to the Welsh Government response (January 2026) to the Health and Social Care Committee's report (November 2025) following the Inquiry into Ophthalmology Services in Wales.

1. Urgency and Interim Action

Optometry Wales was pleased to see the Welsh Government acknowledge the success of community-based optometry primary care through the Welsh General Ophthalmic (WGOS) programmes, which had resulted in more than 90,000 additional optometry appointments in 2024-25 compared with the previous year and will further surpass this in 2025-26 based on current data.

In October 2023, Welsh Government advanced the integration of primary and community care optometry services through Optometry Contract Reform under Wales General Ophthalmic Services (WGOS) consisting of five levels of service. The aim of the integrated eye care pathways is to reduce the number of referrals into hospital eye departments by 1/3 (referral filtering), and to increase capacity in hospital departments by freeing up 35,000 follow up appointments through monitoring, management and treatment in primary care. Optometry practices across Wales have fully embraced the change and the move to a more clinical focus with many clinicians undertaking additional training to upskill in the required qualifications.

Optometry Wales looks forward to continuing to support this shift of eye care services from ophthalmology to optometry to free up more secondary care clinic time for those patients requiring surgical or complex ophthalmology care.

The new Independent Prescribing Service (WGOS5) has had time to embed across Wales with significant patient numbers (26,304 appointments in 2024-25) being seen in primary care that would traditionally have been seen in Eye Casualty hospital clinics and with more optometrists qualifying as independent prescribers in Wales on a monthly basis this is expected to continue.

WGOS4 (Glaucoma, Medical Retina and Hydroxychloroquine) services are the latest services to be rolled out across Wales and are not yet fully embedded. However, patient numbers are starting to increase with 2,520 new appointments created in 2024-25 with more practices joining WGOS4 and expected to further increase once all health boards have established all elements of the service. Optometry had readied themselves to provide these services earlier than Local Health Boards had been able to deliver but it is hoped with the roll out of digital integration that the remaining pathways in the remaining local health boards will be rolled out in the near future.

2. Governance and Oversight

Optometry Wales attends the Ophthalmology Clinical Implementation Network (CIN) which brings together all stakeholders including third-sector organisations to discuss and agree ways to ensure equal care across regions, addressing disparities in care delivery and waiting time performance. In each of the Health Boards Eye Care Collaborative Groups (ECCGs) have been established with both primary and secondary care inclusion to ensure sharing of information, frequency of ECCG meeting is variable across the Health Boards which can impact on the flow of information.

Health Boards also report progress of Optometry contract reform implementation at the Eye Care Wales Committee meetings via a national reporting template and share best practice with all groups. This common sharing of WGOS data alongside ophthalmology waiting time data supports the assessment of new optometry care pathways alongside the data that is collated from the payment/audit WGOS claim forms. Data relating to the number of patients seen under WGOS alongside the number of patients discharged from ophthalmology to WGOS supports the assessment of the effectiveness of new care pathways.

3. Investment and Resourcing

Welsh Government has supported the upskilling of optometrists and dispensing opticians via funding provided to Health Education and Improvement Wales to obtain higher qualifications in Independent Prescribing, Glaucoma, Medical Retina and Low Vision. Optometry practices, clusters and health boards have also provided funding for these higher qualifications. Optometry Wales welcomes the additional investment that has been made via the Welsh Government and Health Education and Improvement Wales to fund the training of significant numbers of optometrists and dispensing opticians to obtain these qualifications to be able to then provide these enhanced services across Wales and support with creating additional capacity in secondary care.

Welsh Government has supported the establishment of three teach and Treat Centres in North, West and South Wales. This ensures that clinical placements required for many of the optometry higher qualifications can be accessed by all practitioners in a timely manner, delays have however meant that North Wales Teach and Treat clinic only came online in the latter part of 2024. In addition, Welsh Government has supported Health Education and Improvement Wales to establish Advanced Training Practices which fund appropriately skilled optometrists to host a clinical placement within their own practice to further enhance clinical placement capacity for higher qualifications. Welsh Government is funding practices for

practitioner time taken out of practice to complete clinical placements required for glaucoma and medical retina higher qualifications.

4. OpenEyes and Digital Delivery

Optometry Wales welcomed the Welsh Government commitment to digital transformation to support integrated, efficient and safe eye care. Optometry Wales welcomed the significant investment in digital transformation along with the direction from Welsh Government for Health Boards to fully implement the OpenEyes electronic patient record (EPR) (in both primary and secondary care) and the Opera electronic referral system (ERS) by the end of March 2026. Optometry Wales has been encouraged by the progress being made to date by the majority of health boards to achieve the objective of the roll out of the ERS but appreciated that there is much work to be done by health boards to achieve this timeline in respect of the EPR due to the increased complexity. Optometry Wales confirms its full support and commitment from the profession in this implementation process and has already appointed digital champions in each of the three Regional Optical Committees who are ready to support practices throughout and beyond the digital implementation stage. Optometry Wales has already spoken to key stakeholders and is ready to support with national and local training events as part of our collaboration with health boards to ensure a seamless process. Optometry Wales fully understands the importance of this digital transformation to improve patient safety and to enable seamless sharing of clinical information and digital imaging between primary and secondary care.

5. Data, Harm Reporting, and Performance

Optometry Wales welcomed the inclusion of optometry within Primary Care Wales Incident Reporting [Primary Care Wales Incident Reporting - NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership](#) and welcomed the opportunity to collaborate with NHS Wales to ensure that the optometry profession was fully aware of the Datix Cymru reporting platform. Optometry Wales supported raising of awareness through a national webinar in collaboration with NHS Wales and provides regular reminders to the profession via the Optometry Wales weekly newsletter.