

Behavioural Optometrists

The Opticians Act 1989, Part IV (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/44/part/IV>) places restrictions on testing of sight, fitting of contact lenses, sale and supply of optical appliances, and the use of titles and descriptions. This legislation recognises two professions, *optometrists* & *dispensing opticians*, and sets out the requirements for their registration with the General Optical Council (GOC).

Thus 'optometrist' is a legally protected title. Paragraph 28 of the Opticians Act describes the penalty for individuals who take or use the title of optometrist when they are not a registered optometrist. This means that anyone in the UK who claims to be an optometrist MUST be appropriately qualified and registered with the GOC. Details of registrants can be found here: <https://www.optical.org/en/utilities/online-registers.cfm>.

The term *behavioural optometrist* is used to describe optometrists who practise with a particular interest in vision development, and in how vision affects the performance of tasks in everyday life. In order to comply with the law described above, all behavioural optometrists must be qualified, registered optometrists. In the UK, those who practise behavioural optometry are represented by the British Association of Behavioural Optometrists ([BABO](#)).

The specialised interests of behavioural optometrists typically include the assessment and management of binocular-oculomotor problems and visual stress as described in the new [SASC Guidance](#) so, in that respect, it is often the case that SpLD assessors of students with visual difficulties will refer them to a behavioural optometrist. However, there are two considerations here:

- 1) The ability to manage these difficulties is not specific to behavioural optometrists. Binocular vision and visual stress assessments may be undertaken by any optometrist, and many optometrists who do not describe themselves as 'behavioural' will offer such services.
- 2) Some behavioural optometrists practise in areas that lie outside the scope of mainstream optometry and there has been criticism that some such practices lack an evidence base ([Barrett, 2009](#) - though see also [Press et al., 2016](#) for a response to this criticism).

For these reasons, it is recommended that SpLD assessors & practitioners should not limit their referrals only to behavioural optometrists, but should refer clients to any optometrist offering comprehensive assessment and management of problems involving binocular vision (accommodation and convergence) disorders, and visual stress, in addition to the standard sight-test comprising refraction and ocular health assessment.