

Question of the Moment: January and February 2016

How was your last visit to the opticians?

Why did we ask this?

Healthwatch Nottingham and Healthwatch Nottinghamshire are independent organisations that help local people get the best from their health and social care services. We listen to people's experiences of services in the city and county and use this evidence to bring about changes in how services are designed and delivered. We decided to collect evidence on experiences of opticians as we wanted to know more about what local people think of these services.

How we collected responses...

We gathered views from local people across Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County in the following ways:

- Face to face with local people at public events and community groups and organisations, including at least 5 Talk 2 Us Points in public venues across Nottingham City and at various community support groups in the county.
- Through an online question linked to our website. The link was also included in our newsletters to our mailing list.
- By asking local opticians to give out a postcard question to the people who used their service during January and February.
- By sending postcard questions to community groups we have worked with before and who have agreed to give them out to local people on our behalf.

When we didn't give them the question card in person we provided freepost envelopes so that people could return their completed questions back to us directly.

Who answered our Question of the Moment?

We had 243 responses from local people. Figure 1 shows more females (n = 139, 58%) than males (n = 77, 32%) answered our question, but 25 (10%) did not tell us their gender.

The responses were predominantly from white people, but as shown in table 1 14% of people didn't tell us their ethnic background.

Figure 1 Gender of respondents



Note: 10% did not provide information
Source: all respondents (n=243)

Table 1 Ethnic background of respondents

Ethnic Background of respondents	Count	%
White	201	83%
Did not disclose	35	14%
Asian/Asian British	6	2%
Mixed/Multiple	1	0%
Total	243	99%

Note: Table does not sum due to rounding
Source: all respondents (n=243)

The age of respondents ranged from 14 years to over 80 years of age, with over half (54%) aged 65 and over.

97 (40%) respondents identified as having some form of disability.

What people said..

Overall, experiences of opticians were very positive. We asked people to rate their experience using a five-star rating where one is the worst and five is the best. The average rating was 4.51.

We received feedback on 60 identifiable Optician services across the city and county. Where multiple responses were gathered average ratings ranged from 3.4 to 5 stars.

Figure 2 Average rating of experience for all respondents



Source: All respondents (n = 242; One respondent did not provide a rating)

Table 2 Rating of experience by age

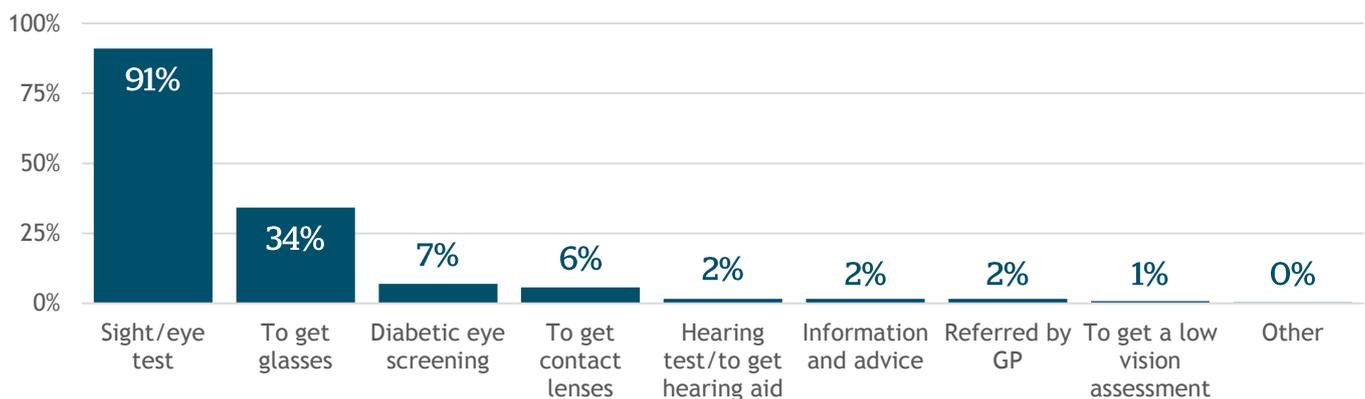
Group	Count	Average	Most frequent
Under 21s	11	4.27	4
Over 65s	132	4.68	5
All respondents	242	4.51	5

Note: One respondent did not provide a rating

There were slight differences in overall ratings of experience by age. Younger people were slightly less positive, and were more likely to provide a lower rating, than respondents who were over 65. Table 2 illustrates the mean rating provided was 4.27, however, this is based on just 11 responses.

The vast majority of respondents visited the opticians to get a sight/eye test but experiences were positive regardless of the reason for attending. Those attending for just one reason gave a slightly higher average rating for their experience than those attending for more than one reason. This difference was not statistically significant.

Figure 3 Reasons for visiting the opticians



Source: all respondents (n = 243)

Note: respondents could tick as many reasons as appropriate

The most talked about positive aspect of people's experiences were their interactions with staff. Over a third (35%) of all respondents made reference to this, most frequently using words such as friendly, helpful and good.

"Staff all very pleasant and really helpful."
Male about a service in Bassetlaw

"Staff always very friendly and helpful, nothing is too much trouble."
Female about a service in Ashfield

Many people talked generally about the staff as a whole, like the comments above which are illustrative of many, but there were also specific comments about the Opticians themselves. These comments were dominated by references to the thorough nature of the examination provided and the professional manner with which it was conducted. For example,

"Examination very thorough, professional and extremely pleasantly done. Top marks."
Female about a service in Bassetlaw

"I was impressed by [the Opticians] professionalism, pleasant manners and care."
Female about a service in Rushcliffe

When people talked about the professionalism of the Opticians, many also referenced their good communication skills. We received many comments (n = 25; 10% of respondents) about how well everything was explained to them whilst sight/eye tests were being undertaken and five patients talked about how they were a good source of information and advice.

"...explained what they were doing and why..."

About a service in Ashfield

"...everything explained well as tests done."

About a service in Bassetlaw

"Lots of good information, advice and guidance."

Female about a service in Bassetlaw

"...very helpful with advice and information."

About a service in Gedling

When people talked about the administrative or reception staff their comments talked generally about the positive experience created by their friendly and helpful welcome, but also more specifically about the experience of choosing frames. There were multiple comments on how they felt they were allowed to take their time to choose and were not pushy in their approach to sales, for example,

"Helpful staff when choosing type of glasses, options explained and cost. Staff great at helping to choose suitable style of glasses..."

Female about a service in Ashfield

"They were really friendly, helped me pick my glasses by asking me questions, wasn't pushy. Helpful"

About a service in Bassetlaw

Despite the positive nature of the ratings provided, 37 people (15% of all respondents) identified some negative aspects of their experience. The most frequently identified negative aspects related to the cost and waiting times, both referenced by just 3% of all respondents.

When talking about cost, people talked about the costs specifically related to lenses or frames and there were two people who mentioned the frequency with which new prescriptions were needed and the mounting costs they incurred.

"Replacing one of the lenses proved too expensive."

Male about a service in Rushcliffe

"...getting the glasses sorted was a nightmare, I ended up paying a small fortune..."

Female about a service in Nottingham City

"...the only downside is I seem to need new glasses each time I go which can be costly."

Male about a service in Rushcliffe

"Unfair - has to pay £300+ for each set of glasses due to cataracts forming."

Male about a service in Newark

Issues around waiting times were most likely to be about delays people experienced going into their appointments. One person talked about waiting times for receiving their prescription glasses.

"...after rushing to arrive five minutes before my 1pm appointment, and then after signing in with reception and waiting until 1.35pm I chose to walk out."

Male about a service in Nottingham City

"...the appointment was delayed."

Male about a service in Newark

"I waited a while before going in."

Female about a service in Bassetlaw

Conclusions and Recommendations

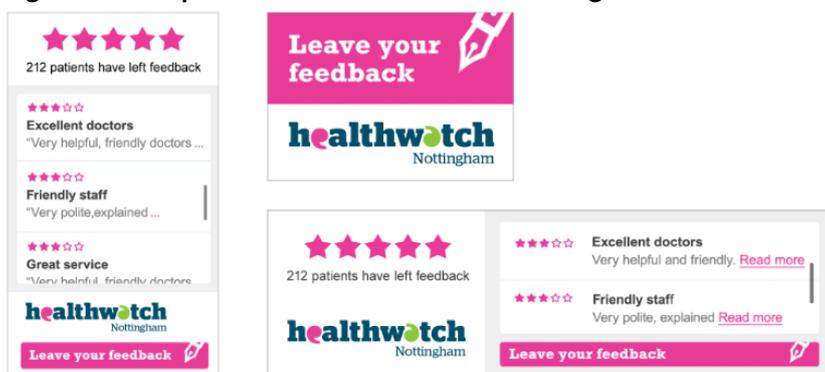
We wanted to find out about local people's experiences of Opticians, and we are very pleased to find that for the vast majority of people their experience has been very positive, regardless of the reason(s) for their visit. We found that staff, both clinical and administrative, were central to these positive experiences due to their friendly and professional manner. This left people feeling confident in their care and is likely to be the reason why many people indicated they had attended the same service for a number of years.

Despite the positive ratings there were still negative aspects of experiences reported although in the main they were clearly not significant for all but a very small number.

Recommendation 1:

Continue to monitor local people's experiences of services to ensure that the positive experiences reported to us are sustained. Healthwatch Nottingham and Healthwatch Nottinghamshire can support this through the free use of a widget (see figure 4 below) to include on service websites which allow patients to leave feedback on their experience. This feedback can then be displayed on the service website but also feed into our evidence base, and could allow us to provide summative analysis of this feedback and identify ways in which these services can secure even further improvement for users.

Figure 4 Examples of Healthwatch website widgets



Recommendation 2:

Gather specific feedback from children and young people to identify whether the slightly lower ratings we found are representative of all in this group. Previous findings from the Healthwatch Nottinghamshire targeted question to children and young people in August 2015 showed that communication with this group is central to them having positive experiences of services, and negative comments from young people about communication in this exercise confirm this. Further evidence collection would help to determine whether additional guidance or training would be useful.