

Invitation to tender (ITT): Public consultation platform

Summary

1. We are looking to commission a safe, secure and reliable public consultation platform which will allow us to collate and analyse views of stakeholders on policy proposals through consultation.
2. Our statement of essential and desirable requirements is set out in annex 1.
3. We have an approved budget of up to a total cost of **£60,000 including VAT and all other contractor costs for a five-year contract**. Proposals over £60,000 will not be considered.
4. **The deadline for tenders is 17:00 on Wednesday 22 July.**

About the GOC

5. We are the regulator for the optical professions in the UK and our mission is to protect the public by upholding high standards in eye care services. We currently register around 35,000 optometrists, dispensing opticians, student optometrists, student dispensing opticians and optical businesses. For more information, please visit our website: <https://www.optical.org/>
6. We mainly use a survey-based approach to consultation. We run approximately four to six public consultations a year to inform policy development in line with our [consultation policy](#). The number of responses varies from 20 to over a thousand, but is typically between 20 and 160. Respondents range from optical sector professional/representative bodies, large and small optical businesses, business registrants, individual registrants, charities and members of the public.

Background

7. We undertake frequent consultations to inform policy proposals. We are looking for a safe, secure, reliable and accessible public consultation platform that will allow us to store all of our consultations in one place, communicate about the overall project to demonstrate transparency in our work, carry out surveys, engage with our stakeholders and analyse the responses to consultation using sophisticated analysis tools such as artificial intelligence.
8. Our aim is to have a platform that is easy for all stakeholders to use and does not create any barriers to participation. We will be drafting the consultation and survey questions ourselves, uploading them to the platform and carrying out the analysis – we therefore want the platform to be user friendly for staff and to enable fast analysis and reporting of the results, reducing the burden on staff.

9. The objectives of this procurement are to:
- provide an accessible, inclusive and user-friendly platform for public participation;
 - enable staff to efficiently design, manage and analyse consultations;
 - ensure compliance with data protection, accessibility and security standards;
 - improve transparency, reporting and evidence-based decision-making; and
 - achieve value for money over the contract term.
10. Our contract with our existing provider is due for renewal on 1 November 2026 and we are looking to contract for a consultation platform for a five-year period.

Requirements

11. Our statement of requirements is outlined in annex 1. We have indicated where these requirements are essential or desirable.
12. We would like our staff to have access to online training on the new platform, with a top-up on an annual basis for new users to the platform. We would also like a support/helpdesk functionality for immediate resolution of concerns.

Budget

13. We have an approved budget of up to a total cost of £60,000 including VAT and all other contractor costs for a five-year contract (ideally to begin on 1 November 2026). Proposals over £60,000 will not be considered.

Timetable

14. The proposed timetable for this project is outlined below. We welcome comments as to whether this is a realistic timetable. (We reserve the right to alter this timetable.)

Task	Date
ITT issued by GOC	17 June 2026
Deadline for queries by potential providers	17:00, 1 July 2026
ITT closing date	17:00, 22 July 2026
Possible demonstrations (if required)	w/c 24 August 2026
Appointment of provider	7 September 2026
Training on platform	w/c 21 September 2026
New five-year contract to start	2 November 2026

Proposals

15. Proposals should clearly state how you would meet the requirements set out in this ITT. They should include:

- a description of the platform (visuals would be helpful) and how it would meet our requirements (including a detailed explanation and examples of the survey tool and automated summary for qualitative analysis), highlighting any gaps – please use annex 1 as a basis for a template indicating where you do or not meet the essential and desirable requirements;
- information about (no more than 200 words per bullet point):
 - where the platform is hosted – if outside the UK, we will need providers to confirm GDPR compliance, and provide details on data security measures, hosting locations and any safeguards in place;
 - data: what happens with the searches and activity on the platform – for example, is this information stored? If it is stored and the GOC decides to stop using the product, will all of this data be deleted?; and
 - data: whether our data would go out on to the internet or on to the provider’s large language models. If so, would that be that identifiable as being from the GOC (by the provider or other customers)?;
- named account manager and how we would work with them, including any initial and ongoing training package;
- prior experience of delivering the platform and use of tools for qualitative analysis of survey responses;
- an appropriate service level agreement setting out reasonable service availability, helpdesk hours, target response times to queries and notification of any system errors/issues, alongside any response to address the errors/issues, within a reasonable timescale;
- details of any conflicts of interest that the provider or team members may have and how these would be managed;
- any further information you require from the GOC;
- an assessment of the key risks and how these will be mitigated;
- a comprehensive itemised cost for all aspects of the work and total cost;
- details of sustainable practices; and
- details of where Government accessibility guidance is not met: [Making your service accessible: an introduction - Service Manual - GOV.UK](#).

Selection process

16. Tenders will be assessed with reference to the following criteria:
 - extent to which proposals meet the requirements of the brief in annex 1 (50%) – all requirements will be given a score out of 3 (ranging from does not meet requirement to exceeds requirement). Essential requirements will be weighted double compared to desirable requirements;
 - the tenderer having appropriate experience of delivering the platform (including experience of use of tools for qualitative analysis of survey responses) (25%); and
 - the ability of the tenderer to start a contract within the specified timescale and at reasonable costs (25%).
17. All work should comply with the Data Protection Act 2018.
18. The Council reserves the right to pay only for work it deems to be satisfactorily completed.
19. The Council is not bound to accept the lowest offer or any tender.
20. Following assessment of proposals, we reserve the right to request of selected potential contractors a further tender, demonstration, proposals or pricing details.

GOC contacts

21. Please send tenders and direct any questions to Marie Bunby (Policy Manager) by email to: standards@optical.org

Data and freedom of information

22. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“FOIA”) applies to the GOC and potential contractors should be aware of our obligations and responsibilities under FOIA to disclose, on written request, recorded information held by the GOC. Information provided by you in connection with this proposal, or with any contract that may be awarded as a result of this exercise, may therefore have to be disclosed in response to such a FOIA request, unless we decide that one of the statutory exemptions under the FOIA applies. If you wish to designate information supplied as part of this response as confidential, or if you believe that its disclosure would be prejudicial to any person’s commercial interests, you must provide clear and specific detail as to the precise information involved. Such designation alone may not prevent disclosure if in our reasonable opinion publication is required by applicable legislation or Government policy or where disclosure is required by the Information Commissioner.

Warnings/disclaimer

23. Offering an inducement of any kind in relation to obtaining this contract with the GOC will disqualify your proposal from being considered. You must not tell anyone else what your proposal or tender price is or will be, before the deadline for proposals. You must not try to obtain any information about anyone else's proposal or make any arrangements with another organisation about whether or not they should make a proposal, or about their or your tender price. Failure to comply with any of these conditions may disqualify your proposal.
24. Nothing contained in this ITT or any other communication made between the GOC or our representatives and any person shall constitute an agreement, contract or representation (except for the formal written contract between the GOC and our preferred supplier). Receipt by the tenderer of this ITT does not imply the existence of a contract or commitment by or with the GOC for any purpose and tenderers should note that this ITT may not result in the award of any business.
25. It is the responsibility of tenderers to obtain for themselves all information necessary for the preparation of their response to this ITT. The information contained in this ITT and the supporting documents and in any related written or oral communication is believed to be correct at the time of publication. The GOC will not accept any liability for its accuracy, adequacy or completeness and no warranty is given as such. We reserve the right to change any aspect of, or cease, the tender process at any time.
26. By issuing this ITT the GOC is not bound in any way and does not have to accept the lowest or any tender.
27. You will not be entitled to claim from us any costs or expenses which you may incur in preparing your tender whether or not your tender is successful and regardless of whether a contract is awarded.
28. In submitting its tender, the tenderer warrants, represents and undertakes to the GOC that:
 - all information, representations and other matters of fact communicated (whether in writing or otherwise) to the GOC by the tenderer, its staff or agents in connection with or arising out of the tender are true, complete and accurate in all respects, both as at the date communicated and as at the date of tender submission;
 - it has full power and authority to enter into the contract and perform the obligations specified in the contract documents;
 - it is of sound financial standing and has and will have sufficient working capital, skilled staff, equipment and other resources available to it to perform the obligations specified in the contract;
 - it will not at any time during the term or at any time thereafter claim or seek to enforce for the purposes of this contract any lien, charge, or other

encumbrance over property of whatever nature owned or controlled by the GOC and which is for the time being in the possession of the tenderer; and

- it shall have in place sufficient policy or policies that demonstrate a commitment to equal pay and [real living wage](#).

Annex 1: Statement of requirements

Requirement	Essential	Desirable
1. A user-friendly interface for both consultation respondents (front-end) and internal staff (back-end) e.g. that it is easy to navigate with clearly labelled options, intuitive to allow users to quickly understand and use the features, and a design that adapts to different devices and screen sizes	x	
2. A platform that can be GOC-branded and themed	x	
3. A platform allowing publication of multiple consultations	x	
4. A platform with no upper limit for consultation responses	x	
5. A platform that does not require creating a log-in profile for respondents to a consultation	x	
6. Ability to design consultation pages that can have any text added to them, with space for clear privacy and consent messaging	x	
7. A platform that will allow us to clearly update on a project prior to, during and post-consultation phase (e.g. next steps once the consultation has closed and we are in the process of analysing responses)	x	
8. A survey tool with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Pages to separate questions by topic b. Ability to save template questions (and ideally to create a template survey with introductory, equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and consent pages) c. Ability to copy questions d. Variety of question types, including matrix questions e. Document uploading (e.g. uploading the consultation document and other supporting documents alongside the survey) 	x	

Requirement	Essential	Desirable
9. Auto-translation into Welsh language	x	
10. Ability to have closed consultations (e.g. only accessible through a link)	x	
11. Respondents to be able to save a partial response and return to it later (ideally without having to create a log-in profile)	x	
12. Ability to view survey responses a) by question (so that we can see all responses to a single question) and b) by respondent (and be able to turn this into a pdf/Word document so that we can see the full response from a respondent)	x	
13. Analytical and reporting functionality for quantitative and qualitative data	x	
14. Accurate automated summary of qualitative responses to each consultation question using machine learning / artificial intelligence to assist with thematic analysis i.e. a tool that gives a number of paragraphs summarising responses to one particular consultation question, pulling out key points/themes	x	
15. Ability to create a page on which to publish responses to the consultation (ideally with ability to anonymise responses as part of the consultation platform)		x
16. Events: a. Ability to hold events through the platform (e.g. events with subtitles / closed captioning) b. Ability to book events through the platform		x
17. Dashboard/reporting facility to monitor click-through rates, drop off points etc		x
18. Link up with Microsoft Dynamics Cloud		x

Requirement	Essential	Desirable
19. Compliant with Data Protection Act 2018 (based on the General Data Protection Regulations) and other relevant legislation	x	
20. Accessible platform – meet and ideally exceed: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2	x	