

Invitation to tender (ITT): Patient and public perceptions of the GOC's standards of practice

Summary

1. We are looking to commission a piece of qualitative research, to understand the views and expectations of patients and the public, on our current standards of practice and proposed areas for revision. This will involve designing and conducting the research, analysis of the data and reporting on the findings.
2. The research, alongside our own internal research activities and other evidence, will inform the GOC's review of the Standards for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians and Standards for Optical Students. Throughout the remainder of the document, we will use the term "standards of practice" – this should be interpreted to mean the two sets of standards noted above. We will also make consequential changes to our Standards for Optical Businesses during the review, but we are not seeking the views of patients or the public on those business standards - [Standards | GeneralOpticalCouncil](#).
3. The overarching aim of the research is to help us better understand:

Patients and the public views and expectations of optical students and professionals and what those mean for our standards of practice.

We are also seeking the views of patients and the public on the following topics:

- the use of social media and online conduct;
 - maintaining appropriate professional and sexual boundaries;
 - the use of technology to provide care;
 - delegation and supervision; and
 - whether there are any other topics which should be covered in our standards.
4. We have an approved budget of up to a total cost of **£50,000 including VAT and all other contractor costs**. Proposals over £50,000 will not be considered.
 5. **The deadline for tenders is 5pm on 24 May 2023.**

About the GOC

6. We are the regulator for the optical professions and some optical businesses in the UK. We are one of nine healthcare regulators in the UK. We currently regulate around 33,000 optometrists, dispensing opticians, student optometrists, student dispensing opticians and optical businesses.

7. Optometrists examine eyes, test sight, and prescribe spectacles or contact lenses for those who need them. They also fit spectacles or contact lenses, give advice on visual problems, and detect any ocular disease or abnormality, referring the patient to a medical practitioner if necessary.
8. A dispensing optician advises on, fits and supplies spectacles after taking account of each patient's visual, lifestyle and vocational needs. They also play an important role in advising and dispensing low vision aids to those who are sight impaired and severely sight impaired as well as advising on and dispensing to children (where appropriate). A fully qualified dispensing optician can undertake additional specialist training to fit and supply contact lenses.
9. The GOC has four core functions:
 - Setting standards for the performance and conduct of our registrants;
 - Approving qualifications leading to registration;
 - Maintaining a register of individuals who are fit to practise or train as optometrists or dispensing opticians, and bodies corporate who are fit to carry on business as optometrists or dispensing opticians; and
 - Investigating and acting where registrants' fitness to practice, or train or carry on business may be impaired.

For more information, please visit our website: [Introduction to the General Optical Council.](#) | [GeneralOpticalCouncil](#)

This piece of research relates to our 'setting standards for the performance and conduct of our registrants' function'.

10. We launched our [Fit for the future - strategic plan 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2025](#), outlining what we plan to do over the next five years. The three main strategic objectives are:
 - Delivering world class regulatory practice;
 - Transforming customer service; and
 - Building a culture of continuous improvement.

This piece of research relates to our 'delivering world class regulatory practice' objective.

Research issues and objectives

11. The current Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians, and Standards for Optical Students were published in 2016. The current Standards for Optical Businesses were published in 2019.
12. The Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians, and Standards for Optical Students are closely aligned in terms of their content. The Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians has 19 standards, whereas the Standards for Optical Students has 18 standards.

There are small nuances in language to differentiate between Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians who are “practising”, and students who are “training” and/or “practising under supervision”. During the research, the standards of practice can be discussed in broad terms and in relation to specific topics, e.g. social media. There is no need to discuss each set of standards individually. However, we will want to consider the extent to which the public have differing expectations of students and professionals.

13. In 2021/22 the Professional Standards Authority undertook a Performance Review ([Periodic Review - GOC 2021-22 \(professionalstandards.org.uk\)](https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk)) which concluded that, “The GOC’s standards for registrants are unchanged, and we have seen no evidence that they have become out of date. We will monitor the GOC’s work as it prepares draft revised standards for consultation.” Whilst the PSA did not raise concerns regarding the existing standards, it is best practice for standards to be reviewed and updated, to ensure they:
 - Remain fit for purpose;
 - Reflect the current context within which registrants practise and students are trained; and
 - Offer continued public protection.
14. In April 2023, we launched a Standards Review. The overarching aim of the Standards Review is to revise and update the existing standards of practice, to comply with the GOC’s statutory duties, and ensure continued public protection.
15. The Standards Review will focus on the Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians, and the Standards for Optical Students. Any changes to those standards will be reflected in amendments to the Standards for Optical Businesses, where necessary.
16. In the scoping phase of the Standards Review, we undertook a piece of background research to understand which areas of our existing standards could benefit from review, and to identify any relevant topics which aren’t currently addressed within our standards. We conducted a desk-based review of relevant literature, reviewed our internal Fitness to Practise data, and undertook a comparative exercise, to compare the GOC’s approach to standard setting with the approaches of other regulators. The background research identified five topics for further exploration: social media and online conduct, maintaining professional/sexual boundaries, leadership (which is not included within this research bid), technological developments and delegation and supervision.
17. We would like this piece of research to help us understand the views and perceptions of patients and the public, on our existing Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians and Standards for Optical Students.

We would also like to explore particular topics that we have identified as being priority areas for a review of our standards. These are patient and public perceptions on:

- How Optometrists, Dispensing Opticians and Optical Students should use social media, for professional and personal purposes, and the impact, if any, of their online conduct.
- How Optometrists, Dispensing Opticians and Optical Students should maintain appropriate professional and sexual boundaries, in relation to both patients, and their colleagues. The impact, if any, of failing to maintain appropriate professional and sexual boundaries.
- How Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians should use technology to provide care, and the actual or perceived impact on patient care. This could include how we ensure Optometrists, Dispensing Opticians and Optical Students are skilled and competent to use new technologies, remote 'v' face-to-face consultations, and how accessibility issues could be accommodated, e.g. lack of digital literacy amongst some patient groups.
- The supervision and delegation of activities to other members of the optical team (including both registered and non-registered staff). Does supervision need to be on-site?
- Whether there are any other topics which patients and the public feel should be included in our Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians, and Standards for Optical Students.

Methodology

18. We would like the appointed agency to advise on the best methodology. Initially we have identified focus group research as it is an ideal method for obtaining in-depth feedback regarding participants attitudes, opinions and perceptions.
19. Stimulus material may be needed to inform the discussion and the GOC will provide some relevant material. While the GOC can provide technical knowledge, we would expect the agency to produce materials that participants can easily understand and engage with and are available in a variety of formats to meet participants needs, e.g. large font.
20. We would like the sample to be representative in respect of gender, age, socio-economic background, disability and ethnicity. This will ensure that we hear from individuals who may be underrepresented during the online consultation phase of the project, e.g. individuals from lower socioeconomic groups, groups facing financial disadvantage (i.e. those who live on less than 60% of the UK's median income), individuals who require information in different formats, e.g., large font, and individuals from minority ethnic groups. The GOC is a UK-wide regulator, and it is important that research activities are carried out within all four nations of the UK.
21. The stratified sample should be selected to include the following groups. We have included percentages of the population who have/have not had a sight test in the list below. This information is taken from our recent public

perceptions research (not yet published but available to the successful research team):

- members of the general public (including people who have had their sight tested within the last two years (77%) and those who have not (20%) with 3% of people saying that they have never had a sight test);
- patients with common eye conditions (e.g., cataracts, glaucoma), who have had their sight tested within the last two years. Our research shows that 90% of patients with glaucoma have had a sight test in the last two years, as have 88% of patients with Dry Age-related Macular Degeneration, 89% of patients with diabetic retinopathy and 95% of patients with cataracts;
- young service users (i.e., 16-25 years old);
- vulnerable service users (e.g., requiring domiciliary care services) and their carers.

Activities and output

22. The appointed agency will be expected to deliver the following:
- Design of the sampling approach;
 - Design questions/prompts based on the research aims;
 - Data collection and data processing;
 - Rigorous analysis of findings and drawing conclusions for the GOC;
 - Production of a draft report;
 - Production of a detailed written report (template to be agreed in advance with the GOC and include infographics) to publishable standards, including annexes and tables as necessary;
 - Preparation, delivery and recording of a presentation of the findings and conclusions to the Advisory Panel or Council; and
 - Delivery of all background and foreground data to the GOC on fulfilment of the contract.

Budget

23. We have an approved budget of up to a total cost of £50,000 including VAT and all other contractor costs. Proposals over £50,000 will not be considered.

Timetable

24. A high-level timetable for this project is outlined below. We will engage with the research agency on the detail of the timetable. (We reserve the right to alter this timetable.)
25. We will ask the agency to present at either a Council meeting or meeting of our Advisory Panel. We will make a recording of this presentation so that it can be played at other meetings, as necessary. We may also publish the recording on our website.

Bid submitted by agency	5pm, 24 May 2023
Interviewing by GOC	w/c 12 June 2023
Agency appointed by GOC and briefing meeting with agency (if required)	w/c 17 June 2023
Research takes place	End of June – August 2023
Draft report submitted by agency	8 September 2023
Final report submitted by agency	22 September 2023
Presentation of findings to our Council or to our Advisory Panel	26 September 2023 (Council) or 13 November 2023 (Advisory Panel)

Proposals

26. Proposals should clearly state how you would meet the requirements set out in this ITT. They should include:
- evidence of an understanding of our requirements;
 - details of the project team, relevant skills and experience (including examples of relevant projects previously conducted) and specific project roles;
 - details of any conflicts of interest that the agency or project team members may have relevant to this work and how these would be managed;
 - details of any information or assistance that will be required from the GOC;
 - details of how this project will be delivered, including the project management procedures and a research timetable for the different stages;
 - 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; and
 - a breakdown of different elements of the research and costs to help us prioritise which methodologies to focus on.

Selection Process

27. Tenders will be assessed with reference to the following criteria:
- extent to which proposals demonstrate understanding of the brief and meet its stated objectives in terms of research design;
 - the tenderer having appropriate skills, qualifications and a track record in delivering similar projects; and
 - the ability of the tenderer to deliver this project within the specified timescale and at reasonable costs.
28. All work should comply with the Code of Conduct of the Market Research Society.

29. The Council reserves the right to pay only for work it deems to be satisfactorily completed.
30. The Council is not bound to accept the lowest offer or any tender.
31. Following assessment of proposals, we reserve the right to request of selected potential contractors a further tender, proposals or pricing details.

GOC contacts

32. Please send tenders and direct any questions to Rebecca Chamberlain (Standards Manager) by email to standards@optical.org

Data and Freedom of Information

33. 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

34. 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.
35. 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.

36. 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.
37. By issuing this ITT the GOC is not bound in any way and does not have to accept the lowest or any tender.
38. 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.