

Invitation to tender: GOC's qualitative research into the lived experience of patients and GOC registrant optometrists and dispensing opticians

Summary

1. We are seeking a market research agency to conduct qualitative research into the lived experiences of particular patient and GOC registrant groups and the difficulties they face in accessing, using, or delivering eye care.

Patients

- GOC research suggests that some patient groups (such as those with a disability, ethnic minorities and those experiencing difficult life circumstances such as financial or personal difficulties) report greater difficulties in accessing and using eye care services.

GOC registrants

- GOC research suggests that particular groups of optometrists and dispensing opticians (such as those with a disability, females and ethnic minorities) are more likely to experience challenging working conditions which can impact on their ability to deliver safe patient care.

2. The aim of this qualitative research is to build on the annual tracking (quantitative) research we currently carry out with [patients and members of the public](#) and [GOC registrants](#). We want to delve more deeply into the 'lived experiences' of these groups, to provide us with greater insight and understanding.
3. As a regulator we are committed to improving the experiences of all patient groups by creating fairer and more inclusive eye care services. We are also committed to tackling negative working environments for our registrants as this not only impacts on their health and wellbeing but also on their ability to deliver safe patient care. These commitments are key objectives outlined in our draft corporate strategy 2025-30.
4. We would like the research to be carried out as two distinct projects (i.e. patients and GOC registrants) with two separate outputs (reports).
5. We have an approved budget of up to **£70,000 including VAT** and all other contractor costs. Proposals over £70,000 will not be considered. The deadline for tenders is **5pm 29 October**, with a view to delivering the final report by the **end of March 2025**.

About the GOC

6. We are the regulator for the optical professions in the UK and our mission is to protect and promote the health and safety of the public. We currently register around 33,000 optometrists, dispensing opticians, student optometrists, student dispensing opticians and optical businesses.
7. We have 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.
 - Investigating and acting where registrants' fitness to practise, train or carry on business may be impaired.
8. For more information please visit the GOC [website](#)

Background

9. We currently carry out two annual tracking surveys that will help inform this research project.

GOC's annual public perceptions survey

10. This is an annual [survey](#) with members of the public and patients across the UK. We have carried out this survey since 2015 with the aim of understanding public views, perceptions, and experiences of receiving eye care. This year we tried to draw out the most important demographic factors that impacted on access and experience of eye care. We asked several new questions to establish whether respondents had any vulnerability markers, including having a disability, financial difficulties, going through a difficult life event (e.g. bereavement), and low confidence in managing their eye health. The analysis then highlighted whether these groups had worse experiences than patients who did not have any of those markers. The research agency (DJS) also used key driver analysis to drill down further into the data to understand which factors had the greatest influence on areas such as patient satisfaction.

GOC's annual registrant survey

11. This is an annual [survey](#) with GOC registrants (i.e. optometrists, dispensing opticians and optical students). This is the fourth recent wave of the survey and this year we received a 15% response rate (4,575 responses). The aim is to capture and track registrant experiences of working in clinical practice, any challenges they face and the impact this might have on patient care. We have continued to ask questions in relation to experiences of bullying, harassment, abuse and discrimination at work.

12. The full reports including executive summaries and infographics are on the GOC [website](#).

Research methodology

13. We would like agencies to advise on the most appropriate methodology and their rationale for this. We would like agencies to bear in mind that the topics that we intend to discuss with both groups will touch on sensitive issues. This could include information about an individual's health, about a patient's difficult experiences or a registrant's experience of bullying, abuse, harassment and discrimination at work. We encourage agencies to reflect on learning they have taken from delivering similarly sensitive research in the past, in terms of advice and support to participants.
14. In terms of recruitment for the patient groups, we would like the appointed agency to take into consideration the following factors:
- We would like a mix of patients and non-patients. By 'patient' we mean anyone who has been for a sight test / eye examination within the last two years. We are interested in those who have not been for a sight test in the last two years (i.e. non-patients) and exploring potential barriers in accessing eye care.
 - In terms of vulnerability, we don't want to limit this to the protected characteristics outlined in equalities legislation. Our 2024 public perceptions survey looked more broadly at 'vulnerability markers' which included questions on financial situation (e.g. low income), those going through a difficult life event (e.g. bereavement), having a disability, and low confidence in managing eye health. We would like to recruit based on these factors, so we can align our quantitative research with the outcomes from this research.
15. This may mean that some pre-screening is needed to identify more vulnerable groups of patients based on our previous research. We would like agencies to advise on how and who they would recruit to ensure a variety of voices.
16. In terms of recruitment for the GOC registrant groups, we would again like agencies to advise on the best method. Our 2024 registrant survey highlighted groups of GOC registrants that reported facing more challenging working conditions:
- Those with a disability
 - Females
 - Those from an ethnic minority background

17. Similarly, this will likely mean some pre-screening questions to filter in those in these sub-groups that have faced more challenging or adverse experiences at work such as bullying, harassment, abuse and discrimination.
18. To avoid any confusion with our annual registrant survey and overcontact, we are not considering directly contacting individual registrants asking them to take part, for example via a mass mailout. However, we can help raise awareness of the project via, for example, our registrant ebulletin (which goes out at the end of each month) and social media. We can also ask the professional and membership bodies if they are able to promote the research to their members.
19. For both projects, it is important as a UK regulator that we have participants from each of the nations.
20. We are also not able to recruit from the 2024 public perceptions or registrant survey as we did not seek consent from respondents to take part in further research activities.
21. We appreciate that we need to strike a balance between the breadth and depth of the both projects. This may mean narrowing the scope of participants and / or topics under discussion. We would like to discuss and finalise our approach with the appointed agency.

Discussion topics

22. We would like to work with the appointed agency in finalising the discussion guides for both projects.
23. To give an idea of what we are looking for, we expect the patient research to build on the findings from the GOC's public perceptions research to explore in more depth areas such as:
 - Frequency of sight tests
 - Barriers to accessing eye care services
 - Confidence in managing eye health
 - Satisfaction levels
 - Adverse experiences
 - Effective interventions which have helped patients to access services
24. For the registrant research, again we expect the appointed agency to build on the findings from the GOC's registrant research to gain more insight into registrant experiences of, for example:
 - Barriers in delivering safe care including challenging working conditions such as bullying, harassment and abuse, and discrimination.

- Other challenging working conditions such working beyond their hours, unable to cope with heavy workloads, commercial pressures, short testing times and overbooked clinics.
- Impacts of challenging working conditions on for example, mental health and wellbeing, career progression, and leaving the professions.
- Effective interventions which have supported registrants when experiencing these working conditions.

Analysis

25. We would like a thorough and robust analysis of the qualitative data, which identifies key and recurring themes for both research projects. We would like two separate reports as an output of the research and analysis.
26. We expect the analysis to build upon and bring to life the issues highlighted in the quantitative research for both projects. This is the first time we are undertaking a qualitative research project to explore these issues so it is important that the findings are robust and can be used to help inform not only our regulatory work but wider sector policy within eye care.

Outputs

27. The appointed agency will be expected to deliver the following:
 - produce two discussion guides that meet the research aims;
 - rigorous analysis of findings and drawing conclusions for the GOC; and
 - production of two detailed written reports (template to be agreed in advance with the GOC and include infographics and/or other visual materials) to publishable standards.
28. Producing visual materials that bring the findings to life and raise awareness is increasingly important to the GOC. Tenders should include examples of past work of a similar standard to what the agency would expect to produce for this survey. The costs of this work should be included within the total budget.

Budget

29. We have an approved budget of up to a total cost of £70,000 including VAT. Proposals over £70,000 will not be considered.

Timetable

30. The timetable for this project is in the table below. (We reserve the right to alter this timetable.)

Task	Date
Contract advertised by GOC	1 October 2024
Deadline for bidders to submit clarification queries	15 October 2024
Deadline for tenders to be submitted	5pm 29 October 2024
Selection process by GOC	Week commencing 4 November 2024
Draft report submitted by agency	28 February 2025
Final report and all other outputs submitted by agency	31 March 2025

Proposals

31. Proposals should clearly state how agencies would meet the requirements set out in this invitation to tender. They should include:
- evidence of an understanding of our requirements;
 - sampling methods;
 - proposed methodology;
 - 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; and
 - a comprehensive itemised cost for all aspects of the work and the total cost of the project.

Selection process

32. Tenders will be evaluated carefully against the award criteria and weightings set out below:

- extent to which proposals demonstrate understanding of the brief, and meet its stated objectives in terms of research design (40%);
 - the tenderer having appropriate skills, qualifications and a track record in delivering similar projects (20%);
 - proposals relating to producing visual materials (20%); and
 - the ability of the tenderer to deliver this project within the specified timescale and budget (20%).
33. All work should comply with the Code of Conduct of the Market Research Society.
34. The Council reserves the right to pay only for work it deems to be satisfactorily completed.
35. The Council is not bound to accept the lowest offer or any tender.
36. Following assessment of proposals, we reserve the right to request a further tender, proposals or pricing details from selected potential contractors.

GOC contacts

37. Please send tenders and direct any questions to Angharad Jones (Policy Manager) by email to ajones@optical.org

Data and Freedom of Information

38. 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

39. 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.

40. 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.
41. 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.
42. By issuing this ITT the GOC is not bound in any way and does not have to accept the lowest or any tender.
43. 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.