

Invitation to tender: Business Registrant Survey 2023

Summary

1. We are seeking a market research agency to conduct an annual quantitative survey of GOC business registrants. The GOC's register contains nearly 3,000 businesses which provide services such as performing the sight test / eye examination and sell spectacles, contact lenses and other optical appliances.
2. A draft questionnaire has been developed and this will need to be refined, but the main tasks for the agency will be carrying out the fieldwork, analysing the findings, and producing a written report and associated outputs.
3. This will be our first survey of business registrants. If successful, we hope to conduct the survey annually to enable us to track changes over time. Therefore, this tender is for three waves of the survey over 2023-25, but with a review after the first wave. We have an approved budget of up to **£45,000 including VAT and all other contractor costs across the three waves** (i.e. averaging £15,000 per year). Proposals over £45,000 will not be considered.
4. **The deadline for tenders is 5pm on 18 October 2023.**

About the GOC

5. 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. For more information, please visit our website: <https://www.optical.org/>
6. There were 2,921 optical businesses registered with the GOC in 2022/23. Note that only a subset of optical businesses is required to register with the GOC depending on factors including the business's structure and name. Estimates suggest that we register around half of optical businesses. **The scope of the research is GOC business registrants only, not all optical businesses.**
7. We launched our [Strategic Plan 'Fit for the Future 2020-2025'](#) on 1 April 2020. This outlines what we plan to do over this five-year period. The three main strategic objectives for the next five years are:
 - delivering world-class regulatory practice;
 - transforming customer service; and
 - building a culture of continuous improvement.

8. The strategy has an increased focus on business regulation, reflecting that the patient's experience is not just dependent on the individual providing the care but also the clinical environment in which care is delivered.
9. The GOC already commissions annual tracker surveys with samples of the public and individual registrants. Business registrants have participated in our stakeholder perceptions surveys and one-off GOC research on specific topics, but we have not conducted a bespoke annual survey of business registrants.
10. We commissioned a mapping of optical businesses in 2022 as part of work on legislative reforms that we hope will extend regulation to all optical businesses. This report provides useful information on the size and characteristics of these businesses that may inform sampling considerations.

Research aims

11. The questionnaire, appended, is modular in design. Our intention is to ask a core set of questions every year so that we can track trends supplemented by questions focused on specific topics that will change from year to year.
12. In short, we would like the research to:
 - build a picture of the size and characteristics of our business registrants;
 - help the GOC understand current issues facing business registrants;
 - identify levels of innovation and technology adoption;
 - explore the role of businesses in training the next generation of eye care professionals and perceptions of newly qualified professionals;
 - understand perceptions of regulation; and
 - inform policy development linked to regulation of optical businesses including proposals for legislative reform and a forthcoming review of our standards of conduct for business registrants.
13. We have received feedback on the questionnaire from FODO – a sector body representing optical businesses. Therefore, we are confident that the questions cover the right areas and should make sense to respondents. However, the GOC's policy team are not experts in questionnaire design, so we would expect the appointed agency to work with us to refine the questions and routing. Further, we have not timed the survey, and acknowledge that the length may need to be trimmed to maximise responses.

Sampling considerations

14. With a total possible sample of only 2,921 optical businesses, achieving a response rate that will generate robust findings is the main risk in this project. Therefore, tenders should set out how sufficient responses will be secured.
15. The GOC can provide email addresses for its registrants, although this contact address will sometimes be a generic address, or the individual may not be the

person in the business best qualified to participate in the survey. We will also help publicise the survey through our networks, newsletters and social media.

16. The GOC is a UK-wide regulator, and it is important that the analysis includes all four nations of the UK. In addition, the optical services market is largely local in nature (notwithstanding online provision in some respects), so we would also expect findings to be reported by government office regions in England.
17. The survey includes a question on business type for segmentation purposes. An important sampling consideration is that for franchises and joint ventures¹ we wish each of the individually owned businesses to respond rather than just the parent company. Franchises (e.g. Boots Opticians) and joint ventures (e.g. Specsavers) account for a significant proportion of business registrants and the research would not produce a viable sample if only the parent company were to respond. Tenders should set out how the agency will address this issue.

Outputs

18. The appointed agency will be expected to deliver the following:
 - refine the questionnaire to meet the research aims;
 - data collection;
 - data processing;
 - rigorous analysis of findings and drawing conclusions for the GOC;
 - production of a detailed written report (template to be agreed in advance with the GOC and include infographics) to publishable standards;
 - produce summary data tables suitable for lay people to understand, which will be published on GOC's website; and
 - produce raw data tables to allow for further data analysis.
19. As a minimum, we would expect the report and associated data tables to segment responses by the variables in Section A of the questionnaire (e.g. age, size, turnover) plus any other variables that the agency considers appropriate.
20. 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.

¹ Similar to a franchise in that the businesses are individually owned whilst receiving support from the wider brand. The main difference is that ownership is held partly by the individual (director) and partly by the parent group.

Budget

21. We have an approved budget of up to a total cost of £45,000 including VAT and all other contractor costs across the three waves of the survey (i.e. averaging £15,000 a year). Proposals over £45,000 will not be considered.

Timetable

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

Task	Date
Contract advertised by GOC	13 September 2023
Deadline for bidders to submit clarification queries	29 September 2023
Deadline for tenders to be submitted	5pm, 18 October 2023
Selection process by GOC	w/c 23 October 2023
Draft report submitted by agency	22 January 2024
Final report and all other outputs submitted by agency	19 February 2024

Proposals

23. 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;
 - 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 total cost.
24. Tenders should address how the agency would deal with the specific sampling challenges identified in this document, namely:
- how sufficient responses will be secured; and
 - ensuring that individual business owners of franchises and joint ventures respond as well as the parent company.

Selection process

25. 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%).
26. All work should comply with the Code of Conduct of the Market Research Society.
27. The Council reserves the right to pay only for work it deems to be satisfactorily completed.
28. The Council is not bound to accept the lowest offer or any tender.
29. We expect to assess proposals 'on the papers' and do not anticipate interviews. Following assessment of proposals, we reserve the right to request a further tender, proposals or pricing details from selected potential contractors.

GOC contacts

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

Data and Freedom of Information

31. 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

32. 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.
33. 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.
34. 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.
35. By issuing this ITT the GOC is not bound in any way and does not have to accept the lowest or any tender.
36. 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.