

## **Invitation to Tender: Independent Prescribing & Contact Lens Opticians consultation**

May 2021

### **Introduction**

This Invitation to Tender (ITT) has been prepared by the General Optical Council (GOC) for the purpose of appointing an agency to work in conjunction with the GOC to conduct a full patient, public and stakeholder consultation on the proposed education and training requirements for GOC approved qualifications for specialist entry to the GOC register as a Contact Lens Optician and Additional Supply, Supplementary Prescribing and/or Independent Prescribing categories.

### **About Us**

The General Optical Council (GOC) is the statutory regulator for UK optical professions. We register around 30,000 optometrists, dispensing opticians, student opticians and optical businesses. Our mission is to protect and promote the health and safety of the public.

### **Background**

In our strategic plan, we committed to delivering and implementing a strategic review of optical education and training to ensure that the qualifications we approve are fit for purpose, meet patient or service-user needs and ensure optical professionals have the expected level of knowledge, skills and behaviours and the confidence and capability to keep pace with changes to future roles, scopes of practice and service redesign across all four nations.

In February 2021 we updated our requirements for GOC approved qualifications for optometrists and dispensing opticians. Our updated requirements (outlined below) replace our current Quality Assurance Handbooks for both professions:

- **Outcomes for Registration**, which describe the expected knowledge, skills and behaviours a dispensing optician or optometrist must have at the point they qualify and enter the register with the GOC.
- **Standards for Approved Qualifications**, which describe the expected context for the delivery and assessment of the outcomes leading to an award of an approved qualification.
- **Quality Assurance and Enhancement Method**, which describes how we will gather evidence to decide whether a qualification leading to registration as either a dispensing optician or an optometrist meets our Outcomes for Registration and Standards for Approved Qualifications, in accordance with the Opticians Act.

Once an optometrist or dispensing optician is registered with the GOC, they may wish to practice in areas of specialist skill and knowledge. Becoming a specialist practitioner requires additional training and qualification. Once the specialist training is completed and their competence assessed, practitioners then register their specialty with us. We have commenced a review for the suite of post-registration specialty qualifications we approve: for dispensing opticians, contact lens qualifications and for optometrists, therapeutic (independent) prescribing qualifications. Our current requirements for these qualifications are published on our website; as part of our Education Strategic Review (ESR) we are working with two EAGs' one for therapeutic (independent) prescribing and one for contact lens opticians to update our education and training requirements for GOC approved qualifications for specialist entry to the GOC register as a Contact Lens Optician

and in Additional Supply (AS), Supplementary Prescribing (SP) and/or Independent Prescribing (IP).

### **Section One – Aim of the consultation**

The aim of the consultation is to gain stakeholder feedback on:

- Listing non-GOC approved qualifications onto our register;
- Proposed changes to draft '**Outcomes for Registration**', '**Standards for Approved Qualifications**' and '**Quality Assurance and Enhancement method**' for entry to the speciality registers for Independent Prescribing (AS, SP & IP) and Contact Lens Opticians;
- Understand the impacts of the proposed changes will have on stakeholders across four nations, including:
  - GOC registrants (optometrists, dispensing opticians, contact lens opticians and therapeutic prescribers, as well as student optometrists and dispensing opticians)
  - providers of GOC-approved qualifications<sup>1</sup>
  - professional and membership bodies within optics; and
  - employers of optometrists and dispensing opticians (some of which may be registered with us as optical businesses)
  - commissioners and funders of eye-care services, including hospital eyecare services
  - third sector organisations, including sight loss charities
  - higher education and further education institutions' regulators, funders and representative bodies
  - skill and training agencies, including publicly funded healthcare education, workforce development and training bodies (NES, HEIW, HEE & Dept of the Economy, NI)
  - patients, service users and the public

Once we have consulted on our draft requirements this summer 2021, and once approved, the new requirements will replace our [current Quality Assurance Handbooks](#) and related policies for both speciality professions. The current drafts are each organised in three sections:

- **Outcomes for Approved Qualifications for specialist entry to the GOC register (AS, SP & IP) and as a Contact Lens Optician (CLO)** which describe the expected knowledge, skills and behaviours an optometrist/dispensing optician must have for the award of an approved qualification for specialist entry to the GOC register in Additional Supply (AS), Supplementary Prescribing (SP) and/or Independent Prescribing (IP) categories and as a Contact Lens Optician.
- **Standards for Approved Qualifications for specialist entry to the GOC register (AS, SP & IP) and as a Contact Lens Optician** which describe the expected context for the delivery and assessment of the outcomes leading to an award of an approved qualification for specialist entry to the GOC register in the AS, SP and/or IP categories and as a Contact Lens Optician.

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<sup>1</sup> As part of our approval and quality assurance (A&QA) of education establishments and qualifications (referred to as 'providers' and 'programmes' respectively), all providers are required to demonstrate how they satisfy our requirements.

- **Quality Assurance and Enhancement Method** describes how we will gather evidence to decide whether a qualification **for specialist entry to the GOC register in the AS, SP and/or IP categories and as a Contact Lens Optician** meets our Outcomes for Approved Qualifications for specialist entry to the GOC register (AS, SP & IP) (CLO) and Standards for Approved Qualifications for specialist entry to the GOC register (AS, SP & IP) (CLO), in accordance with the Opticians Act. This method **statement** is common to qualifications for specialist entry to the GOC register.

The outcomes and standards for approved qualifications for specialist entry to the GOC register (AS, SP & IP) (CLO) once approved by GOC Council will replace our 'Handbook for Optometry Specialist Registration in Therapeutic Prescribing' published July 2008 and the 'Competency Framework for Independent Prescribing' published in 2011. The outcomes and standards for approved qualifications for specialist entry to the GOC register as a Contact Lens Optician replace our 'Visit handbook guidelines for the approval of training institutions and providers of schemes for registration for United Kingdom trained Contact Lens Opticians' published July 2007 and the 'Contact Lens Speciality Core Competencies' published in 2011. This includes the list of required core-competences, the numerical requirements for trainees' practical experiences, education policies and guidance contained within the handbooks, and our policies on supervision and recognition of prior learning, which are published separately.

Together these documents will ensure the specialist post-registration qualifications we approve are responsive to a rapidly changing landscape in the delivery of eye-care services and fit for purpose in each of the devolved nations. This includes the changing needs of patients and service users and enhanced roles for dispensing opticians within new models of service delivery, not least as a result of the COVID-19 emergency and increased expectations of trainees and their employers, and ensure that the qualifications we approve are fit for purpose.

These proposals are based on our analysis of key findings from our Call for Evidence, Concepts and Principles Consultation published in 2017-2018, feedback from our 2018-2019 consultation on proposals stemming from the Education Strategic Review (ESR) and associated research and 2020 public consultation. For more information please see the [GOC's consultation hub](#).

## **Section Two – Format & Phasing**

The appointed agency will plan and undertake certain phased consultation activities in conjunction with the GOC in order to meet our aims. These are as follows:

- Phase 1: Consultation planning
- Phase 2: Consultation and engagement activities
- Phase 3: Analysis and report writing to bring together the findings of the public consultation survey hosted by the GOC and the further qualitative work undertaken by the agency. The report will summarise the methodology, findings, key themes and conclusions.

### **Phase 1: Consultation planning**

We would like an agency to work in collaboration with us to determine the most effective ways to gain insight from our diverse stakeholder base. We propose that:

- **the GOC** will focus on drafting the consultation document and undertaking an online public consultation (to be hosted on our consultation platform, Citizen Space, using a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions). We will also promote the consultation with a range of our stakeholders; and
- **the agency** will focus on assisting the GOC with the design of the consultation questions, as well as additional data collection and information gathering from the range of stakeholders (outlined on page two) – this data collection will involve qualitative activities such as focus groups, telephone interviews etc (the results of which the agency will combine with the results of the survey to produce a report analysing all of the data obtained through the consultation).

## Phase 2: Consultation

The agency will undertake consultation and engagement activities as agreed in Phase 1 above, over a three-month period from July to September 2021.

During the same three-month period, the GOC will publish and promote its public consultation survey on the Citizen Space platform.

## Phase Three: Analysis and reporting

The agency will undertake analysis of the data collected as part of its own activities. Phase two and three to run concurrently where possible, to begin data analysis as soon as practical. Sharing preliminary results with the GOC in the last week of September. This does not need to be in the format of the final report. Our requirements are:

- analysis should be rigorous with conclusions drawn from the research;
- approaches to this should be explained in any response to this invitation to tender;
- the outcomes of the consultation activity and analysis should be presented in a publication-quality report, provided to the GOC in PDF on **Monday 1 November**;
- the agency will be expected to present the report and a summary of its findings in person or online during at least one GOC meeting.

## Timetable

An outline timetable for the consultation is provided below.

Activity	Date
Brief issued	Tuesday 25 May
Deadline for tenders	Tuesday 6 July (5pm)
Applicant interviews or written queries	Week commencing 5 July
Appoint agency	Friday 9 July
Briefing meeting with agency	Week commencing 12 July
GOC planning	Early June -14 July
Phase One: Planning	3 – 14 July
Phase Two: Consultation / engagement activities	20 July – 16 October (12 weeks)

Phase Three: Data analysis and report writing	To commence as soon as practical
Preliminary results to GOC	Last week in September
Completion of data analysis (reported to GOC)	Two weeks after consultation closes
Handover of final report	1 November
Presentation to GOC Council meeting	8 December

## Budget

Quotes over £45k will not be considered (incl VAT and all contractor costs)

## Submission of Tenders

Your proposal must be received in MS Word format (not PDF) by email to [ESR@optical.org](mailto:ESR@optical.org) no later than **10am, 6 July 2021**.

Late proposals will not be considered.

Proposals should clearly state how you would meet our objectives. They should include:

- the proposed consultation methodologies and their relevance;
- details of the project team, including skills, experience and specific project roles;
- an outline of proposed consultation activities;
- details of any information or assistance that will be required from the GOC;
- details of how this project will be delivered, including project management procedures and a research timetable for the different stages;
- an itemised costing for all aspects of the work, and a total cost;
- details of any risks and how they would be mitigated, with special attention to working through this period of isolation.

## Selection process

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, including research ethics;
- the tenderer having appropriate skills, qualifications and a track record in delivering similar projects;
- the ability of the tenderer to deliver this project within the specified timescale and at a reasonable cost, displaying value for money; and
- management and avoidance of any bias and/or conflicts of interest.

The GOC Council reserves the right to pay only for work it deems to be satisfactorily completed. The Council is not bound to accept the lowest offer or any tender.

## GOC contacts

The GOC contact for this work is Simran Bhogal, Education Manager – Policy, Projects & Research, [sbhogal@optical.org](mailto:sbhogal@optical.org). If you have any questions or would like to discuss this

specification please contact by email.

## **Annex – definitions**

### **Annex**

1. 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.
2. 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 partially sighted, 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.
3. The GOC has four main functions:
  - setting standards for education, training, performance and conduct
  - approving qualifications leading to registration
  - maintaining a register of individuals fit to practice, train or carry on business
  - acting where registrants' fitness to practice, train or carry on business may be impaired

We currently register approximately:

- 15,000 Optometrists
- 6,800 Dispensing Opticians
- 3,800 student Optometrists
- 1,800 student Dispensing Opticians
- 2,600 optical businesses

There is more information about the GOC's work at [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org)