

Invitation to tender: GOC's qualitative research into reforming its system of business regulation

Summary

1. We are seeking a market research agency to conduct online focus groups with members of the public to help inform a project we are carrying out into reforming our system of optical business regulation. It is important that we hear from members of the public on the policy changes we intend to make.
2. We have an approved budget of up to **£20,000 including VAT** and all other contractor costs. Proposals over £20,000 will not be considered. We also have a budget of **£5,000 including VAT** available for some omnibus questions that we may do as follow up (please refer to paragraphs 20 and 21 for more information).
3. The deadline for tenders is **5pm 6 November**, with a view to delivering the final report by the **14 March 2025**.

About the GOC

4. 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.
5. 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.
6. For more information, please visit the GOC [website](#)

Background

7. One of our statutory functions is to regulate optical businesses. The legislation around GOC business regulation is complex and does not provide for a clear and consistent system of regulation. Currently not all optical businesses are required to register with the GOC (according to our research this is around half of all businesses). It is important to address this public protection gap, as the patient experience is not just dependent on the individual providing the care but also the clinical environment in which care is delivered. It is important that we are able to regulate the whole sector effectively and all optical businesses are complying with regulatory standards.
8. We are currently in the process of developing a new model of business regulation. A key aim of reforming our system is to improve public protection and confidence. The benefits to patients and the public include the following:
 - Closing the regulatory gap that exposes patients to potential harm as currently some businesses sit outside of regulation. The current model has resulted in an outdated, complex and piecemeal system of regulation, which is not led by a risk-based approach to public protection but is dependent on the structure of the business rather than the clinical activities it carries out.
 - Strengthening organisational governance. Our proposal for a head of optical practice within a business would ensure there is someone with overall responsibility for implementing effective policies and processes.
 - A simplified system for patients and the public in tune with their expectations. Many will be unaware that the same eye care services are being provided by a range of regulated and unregulated optical businesses.
 - Improved access to consumer redress. We propose that all consumers using business registrants will have access to an independent redress scheme.
9. We are issuing a public consultation in October / November 2024, however, we do not anticipate getting many responses, if any, from members of the public, so it is important that the research fills this gap. The issues we are consulting on are quite technical in nature, and we will work with the appointed agency to ensure they are communicated in a simple and digestible way. We do not envisage covering all the topics in the consultation, but we have provided a summary of key points arising in paragraph 15.

10. We can give the appointed agency a copy of the consultation document once finalised. A draft version can be found on the GOC [website](#).

Research methodology

11. Due to the small budget we envisage that this will be online focus groups, but agencies can advise on this in their bids.
12. We would like to hear from a variety of different voices, so it's important that there is a good demographic split between, for example, age, gender and ethnicity.
13. It is also important as a UK regulator that we have participants from each of the nations.

Discussion topics

14. As mentioned previously, we will be issuing a public consultation, however, as the areas are quite technical, we will work with the appointed agency to finalise the discussion guide and prioritise the questions we would like views on.
15. To give an idea of what we are looking at exploring this is likely to be:
 - Public awareness of optical business regulation
 - Key issues affecting public trust and confidence
 - The main policy reforms we want to implement which will help improve public trust and confidence are:
 - i. Expanding the scope of regulation to bring all optical businesses into regulation
 - ii. Introducing a new head of optical practice within a business to provide greater organisational governance and assurance.
 - iii. Introducing new regulatory powers relating to enforcement and sanctions.
 - iv. Strengthening the system of consumer redress to protect consumers when something goes wrong.

Analysis and report

16. We would like a thorough and robust analysis of the qualitative data. It is important the analysis identifies key and recurring themes and address the questions we will ask in relation to our policy proposals.
17. We expect a detailed report that brings to life the public's views of the changes we are intending to make to our system of business regulation.

Outputs

18. The appointed agency will be expected to deliver the following:

- produce a discussion guide that meets the research aims;
- 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) to publishable standards;
- data tables for the quantitative element (omnibus survey) should we chose to go ahead with this.

19. 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

20. We have an approved budget of up to a total cost of £20,000 including VAT. Proposals over £20,000 will not be considered.
21. We are also considering asking some omnibus questions after the qualitative research and have a budget of £5,000 including VAT for this. We would like the data tables as an output and do not require a written report. We would like agencies to itemise for this element separately.

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	9 October 2024
Deadline for bidders to submit clarification queries	23 October 2024
Deadline for tenders to be submitted	5pm 6 November 2024
Selection process by GOC	Week commencing 11 November 2024
Draft report submitted by agency	14 February 2025
Final report and all other outputs submitted by agency	14 March 2025

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;

- 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

24. 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%).

25. All work should comply with the Code of Conduct of the Market Research Society.

26. The Council reserves the right to pay only for work it deems to be satisfactorily completed.

27. The Council is not bound to accept the lowest offer or any tender.

28. Following assessment of proposals, we reserve the right to request a further tender, proposals or pricing details from selected potential contractors.

GOC contacts

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

Data and Freedom of Information

30. 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

31. 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.
32. 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.
33. 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.

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