Introduction

1. The General Optical Council (GOC) is the regulator for the optical professions in the UK. In effect, this means that we register most individuals who work within an opticians’ practice (i.e. optometrists and dispensing opticians) and a large number of the practices themselves (NB: we do not register ophthalmologists or orthopists). Our mission is to protect and promote the health and safety of the public.

2. One area of the work that we do is to set standards for the people and practices that we register. The GOC published new Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians and Standards for Optical Students which came into effect in April 2016 and are accessible on our website1. The remaining set of standards to be revised and published relates to our business registrants, i.e. the opticians’ practices in which optometrists and dispensing opticians work.

3. The GOC currently outlines the standards that businesses are expected to meet within our Code of Conduct for Business Registrants. We intend to update and more clearly outline our expectations of registrants in a new document which will be called Standards for Optical Businesses.

4. Not all optical businesses need to be registered with the GOC – only those who wish to use a protected title in their company or business name are statutorily compelled to do so. A number of optical businesses who fall outside this scope have the option of registering with us voluntarily and the criteria for voluntary registration are set out in our governing legislation, the Opticians Act2. The GOC’s position going forward is to seek legislative change so that all optical businesses carrying out restricted functions3 are required to be GOC registrants, but seeking such change does not form part of this project.

5. The ultimate aim of our standards is to promote, encourage and facilitate positive behavioural change in the optical professions.

6. We are seeking to appoint an agency to work in conjunction with the GOC to conduct a wide-ranging consultation with our stakeholders.

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2 [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk)
3 ‘Restricted functions’ are those set out in the Opticians Act as being limited to being undertaken by specific categories of practitioner. Testing vision is one of these, and can only be undertaken by an optometrist or a medical doctor.
Aims of the consultation

7. The aims of the consultation are as follows:

a. To ensure that the final *Standards for Optical Businesses* promote positive behavioural change in the optical sector and reflect the learning from a range of recent healthcare reviews

b. to understand the impact the proposed draft *Standards for Optical Businesses* will have on stakeholders, including:
   i. The general public
   ii. Patients
   iii. GOC registrant directors and owners of optical businesses of differing types (i.e. sole traders, hospital-based, online-only, partnerships and bodies corporate)
   iv. Lay owners of optical businesses of differing types (see above)
   v. Optometrist and dispensing optician registrants – i.e. employees of optical businesses
   vi. Student optometrists and dispensing opticians
   vii. Internal GOC staff and committees (particularly those working within the Fitness to Practise directorate)
   viii. Professional and membership bodies within optics
   ix. Education and training providers - those who run clinics for students, and those working in conjunction with employers to deliver educational pathway via clinical placements
   x. Optical complaints bodies and insurers, including the Optical Consumer Complaints Service
   xi. Care commissioners
   xii. NHS and government bodies
   xiii. Patient safety groups
   xiv. Charities and third-sector organisations with an interest in eye health and eye care
   xv. Other healthcare professionals, including those working within eye care
   xvi. Other regulators of healthcare professionals and/or other regulators that regulate businesses

c. To ensure that the final *Standards for Optical Businesses* developed are clear and accessible to a variety of audiences

d. To develop *Standards for Optical Businesses* that reflect the realities of a broad spectrum of business models and practice settings within the sector and can be implemented accordingly

e. To develop *Standards for Optical Businesses* that are sufficiently future-proof to cope with the rapidly changing scopes of practice across the professions
To develop *Standards for Optical Businesses* that are fit for purpose as a benchmarking tool for registrant behaviour

**More about the GOC**

8. The General Optical Council (GOC) is the regulator for the optical professions in the UK. In effect, this means that we register most individuals who work within an opticians practice (i.e. optometrists and dispensing opticians) and a large number of the practices themselves (NB: we do not register ophthalmologists or orthopists). Our mission is to protect and promote the health and safety of the public.

9. We currently register:
   a. c.15000 optometrists;
   b. c.6800 dispensing opticians;
   c. c.3800 student optometrists;
   d. c.1800 student dispensing opticians;
   e. and c.2600 optical businesses.

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. The GOC has four primary functions:
   - setting standards for education and training, performance and conduct;
   - approving qualifications leading to registration;
   - maintaining a register of individuals fit to practise, train or carry on business; and
   - acting where registrants’ fitness to practise, train or carry on business may be impaired.

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

**Format and phasing**
14. 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:
   a. Phase 1: Consultation planning
   b. Phase 2: Consultation and engagement activities
   c. Phase 3: Analysis and report writing to bring together the findings of the public consultation survey hosted by GOC and the further qualitative work undertaken by the agency. The report will summarise the methodology, findings, key themes and conclusion.

Phase 1: Consultation planning

15. We would like an agency to work in collaboration with the GOC to determine the most effective ways to gain insight from our diverse stakeholder base, identified at 7b.

   a. The GOC will focus on undertaking a general public consultation survey by using the Citizen Space platform. We will also promote the consultation with a range of our stakeholders and;
   b. The agency will focus on assisting the GOC with the design of the above consultation survey, as well as additional data collection and information gathering from GOC registrants (optometrists, dispensing opticians, students and optical businesses), patients and the public, GOC staff and committees and, so far as possible, unregistered optical businesses.

16. The main tool utilised by the GOC for collecting quantitative data will be an online and paper survey to be developed by the GOC, with input from the agency in relation to survey and question design. The survey will have the draft Standards for Optical Businesses annexed for respondents' ease of reference. The online survey will be hosted on a GOC microsite (the Citizen Space platform) which has inbuilt analytics tools to evaluate data collected.

17. The survey will cover a number of themes:
   a. Impact of the draft Standards
   b. Clarity of structure, format and language used in draft Standards
   c. Content of the draft Standards
   d. Understanding of the GOC’s regulatory remit
   e. Perceptions of the GOC’s expectations based on the draft Standards
   f. The need for any supporting guidance as a result of the draft Standards

18. There will be some scope in the survey to provide qualitative comments and the appointed agency will need to assist us with development of appropriate questions.

19. All stakeholders will be encouraged to feed back via the public consultation survey as well as taking part in any engagement activities specifically geared towards them.
20. We are looking for the agency to undertake further qualitative data collection exercises to support the mainly quantitative data we will gather through the public consultation survey, to deepen our insight into the issues affecting optical businesses from a range of perspectives. We are open to a range of methodologies to achieve this aim, but we will agree this as part of the tender process.

21. The agency will undertake these further information gathering exercises with the following stakeholder groups:

a. **Patients and the public**
   
i. Our definition of ‘patients’ is those individuals who have visited an optician in the last two years (for themselves, rather than accompanying another) and ‘the public’ as everyone else (i.e. those who have visited an optician more than two years ago, or never).
   
   ii. For the purposes of this exercise, we are happy for patients and the public to be consulted as one group.
   
   iii. We are flexible as to what methodologies are used by the agency, but the exercise should provide qualitative data on the experiences of visiting an optical practice and the standard of care that patients and the public receive. The sample size should be sufficient to have statistical validity and be appropriately spread across the four nations of the UK.
   
   iv. The agency will be provided with the results of previously conducted GOC research involving patient groups, such as our Public Perceptions Survey, to help determine the scope of the consultation and engagement exercises.

b. **Optical students and supervisors**
   
i. As the future workforce in optics, it is important that we gain good quality feedback on the draft *Standards for Optical Businesses* from students and graduates of both optometry and dispensing optics.
   
   ii. There are currently 12 institutions offering optical qualifications at undergraduate level across the UK.
   
   iii. In optometry, qualification consists of a full-time degree followed by a salaried clinical placement of just over one year on average, generally within a private optical business. The clinical placement is under the supervision of a GOC-registered optometrist or dispensing optician who are vetted and quality assured by the education provider. It is their experience of studying within an optical business environment about which we would like greater insight.
iv. The GOC is keen to increase levels of engagement with students and therefore is open to using innovative methodologies to drive this. The agency will work with the GOC to determine a stratified sample reflective of our diverse student registrant base, which can be done by interrogating the registrant data we already hold.

c. Optometrists and dispensing opticians

i. The consultation exercise should include activities to obtain greater qualitative data from individual registrants on the draft Standards and of their experiences more generally about working within an optical business (registered or otherwise), to supplement the responses received to the GOC’s survey. (This could also be the opportunity to explore whether they act as a student supervisor as outlined in section above).

ii. We are keen to obtain feedback from registrants in all four nations of the UK, as well as those who are rarely heard in GOC consultation exercises and welcome the agency’s views on the best methodologies to ensure this.

iii. The agency will work with the GOC to determine a stratified sample which is reflective of our diverse registrant base. As with students, such a sample can be obtained from the registrant data held by the GOC.

d. Owners/directors of optical businesses

i. It is crucial to hear from owners and directors of optical businesses so that we can ensure that the Standards can be practically implemented in a variety of practice contexts and do not overly burden either the business or its employees.

ii. Owners and directors of optical businesses may be lay persons or registered with the GOC as optometrists or dispensing opticians. For the purposes of this exercise, we would like to have input from both groups.

iii. As not all optical businesses are compelled to register with the GOC, we would also like to get feedback from those who own unregistered businesses as well as those which are registered. Whilst it is difficult to definitively pinpoint the number of unregistered optical businesses – simply by virtue of their being unregistered – we are confident that we can identify a proportion of these by working with optical membership bodies. The agency will work with the GOC to determine an appropriate sample.

iv. As part of a separate project, the GOC is seeking legislative change to require all optical businesses to be registered. We are therefore interested in the impact of extending the standards in future and need
to consult with those who are currently unregistered to understand this impact.

v. The GOC will also undertake informal engagement with optical businesses during the consultation period to encourage their participation in the process and therefore a joined-up approach with the agency’s activities will be necessary.

A fifth category of stakeholders will not require the agency’s involvement in collecting data, but the GOC will require input in terms of developing the approach to collecting the data ourselves:

e. GOC staff and committees

i. These persons apply the standards as part of their day-to-day roles and therefore it is important that their views are sought on the clarity and practicality of the draft Standards. We would require the agency to assist us in development of a standard approach to qualitative data collection, which we would then collect ourselves and feed back to the agency for analysis.

ii. There are, at the time of writing, around 85 staff and committee members in this demographic.

Phase 2: Consultation

22. The agency will undertake consultation and engagement activities as agreed in Phase 1 above, over a three-month period from April to June 2018.

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

Phase 3: Analysis and reporting

24. The agency will undertake analysis of the data collected as part of its own activities and via the GOC’s consultation survey and other data collection activities as stated above.

25. Analysis should be rigorous and approaches to this should be explained in any response to this invitation to tender.

26. The outcomes of the consultation activity and analysis should be presented in a publishable-quality report, copies of which should be provided to the GOC. The agency will be expected to present the report and a summary of its findings in person during at least one GOC meeting.

Timetable

27. An outline timetable for the consultation is provided below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brief issued</td>
<td>27 March 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deadline for tenders</td>
<td>5pm, 19 April 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applicant interviews</td>
<td>25 April 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appoint agency</td>
<td>Week commencing 30 April 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Briefing meeting with agency</td>
<td>Week commencing 7 May 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 1: Consultation planning</td>
<td>May 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2: Consultation and engagement activities</td>
<td>May- August 2018 (3 month period – exact dates to be agreed)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analysis of data obtained</td>
<td>21 August – September 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final report required</td>
<td>30 September 2018</td>
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</tbody>
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**Budget**

1. Please provide quotes based on a budget of £45,000 including VAT and up to a maximum of £60,000 including VAT.

**Submission of proposals**

2. 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 their relevant skills and experience and specific project roles;
- an outline of indicative question areas for the GOC consultation survey and for any other activities proposed, including any surveys the project team would seek to run;
- 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;
- a comprehensive itemised costing for all aspects of the work and a total cost;
- details of any risks identified and how they would be mitigated.

**Selection process**

3. 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;

• Management and avoidance of any bias and/or conflicts of interest.

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

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

**GOC contacts**

6. The Project Manager for this work is Natalie Heppenstall, Standards Manager at the GOC. Tenders should be emailed to nheppenstall@optical.org. If you have any questions or would like to discuss this specification please contact Natalie Heppenstall by email or by phone on 020 7307 3921.