

Invitation to Express an Interest

Fitness to Practise Audit of decisions (2020-2022)

The General Optical Council (GOC) is the regulator for the optical professions in the UK. Our purpose is to protect the public by promoting high standards of education, performance and conduct amongst opticians. We currently register around 30,000 optometrists, dispensing opticians, student opticians and optical businesses.

Our four core regulatory functions are:

- Setting standards for optical education and training, performance and conduct.
- Approving qualifications leading to registration.
- Maintaining a register of individuals who are qualified and fit to practise, train or carry on business as optometrists and dispensing opticians.
- Investigating and acting where registrants' fitness to practise, train or carry on business is impaired.

This procurement process is being undertaken as a restricted tender procedure, pursuant to section 6.2 (ii) of the GOC Contracts and Procurement Policy:

<https://www.optical.org/download.cfm?docid=4E059864-DC2B-4A6C-A0F5350B72A6AF34>

Please note that this process falls outside of EU procurement regulations.

This process is being managed via the website:

<https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Search>

1. The Service

The GOC seeks to procure a provider to conduct three annual audits of decisions made by the GOC registrar, case examiners (CEs), Investigation Committee (IC) and Fitness to Practise Committee (FTPC), to ensure the decisions are in accordance with the GOC's overarching objective to protect the public.

The GOC's Fitness to Practise (FTP) Rules came into effect on 1 April 2014. The main change brought about with these Rules was the introduction of CEs, who now consider the vast majority of cases as preliminary decision makers, in place of the IC.

The audits will primarily focus on higher risk decisions;

- Registrar decisions not to open a FTP investigation
- CE/IC decisions not to refer a case to the FTPC
- FTPC decisions not to impose an interim order
- FTPC decisions where there is a finding of no misconduct or no impairment

The audits will consider the appropriateness of the decision-making, together with the decision reasoning and the quality of the decision drafting. The reviews will consider these aspects of decision-making within the context of the GOC's FTP legislation and the published guidance that decision makers are required to follow:

https://www.optical.org/en/about_us/legislation/index.cfm

https://www.optical.org/en/Investigating_complaints/fitness-to-practiseguidance/index.cfm

The audit is essential for ensuring that the GOC can demonstrate that its decisions are made to a high level of quality and consistency.

The provision of this service will be governed by an agreement commencing 15 May 2020 with a view to the audit commencing by 1 June 2020 and being concluded by 1 August 2020.

The service provider will also be expected to present their audit conclusions to both the CEs/IC (usually November) and FTPC (usually September) at two separate annual training events.

The length of the contract is for a three-year period, auditing decisions made during the periods;

- 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020
- 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021
- 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022

We are looking to appoint a single service provider.

2. Service Requirements

Our requirements are:

- Cases to be audited will be selected randomly by the auditor
- The audit will be undertaken at GOC offices (file reviews)
- The audit (file reviews) is conducted between 1 June and 31 July for each of the three years

- The draft audit report is received each year by the GOC by 14 August
- The final audit report is received each year by the GOC by 31 August
- The audit identifies issues that may need to be addressed in training programmes for FTP staff, CEs, the IC and the FTPC
- The audit identifies areas where existing guidance needs to be revised, clarified or new areas added that are not currently covered;
- The audit identifies areas where staff training needs to be undertaken;
- The audit identifies best practice that can be shared with all decision-makers to ensure the maintenance of high standards of decision-making and drafting of reasons
- The auditor delivers feedback to decision makers at two annual events (usually September and November)

3. Indicative Timetable (may change)

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| 12 February 2020 | Advertise Expression of Interest |
| 16 March 2020 (17:00) | Expressions of Interest closes |
| 20 March 2020 | Invitation to tender in full (to those invited) |
| 15 April 2020 | Tender period closes |
| 30 April (latest) | Contract decision issued |
| 18 May 2020 | Contract commences |
| 1 June 2020 | Audit commences |

4. Assessment Criteria (Expression of Interest stage only)

To express an interest, respondents must have had no direct connection to the GOC after 1 April 2015, unless for the purposes of undertaking audit-related activity. Respondents must also disclose any pre-April 2015 connection that they believe could give rise to an actual or perceived conflict of interests.

Expressions of Interest will be assessed against the following criteria:

- A. Evidence of a very good knowledge/understanding of professional regulation.

(This is a PASS/FAIL criterion – where no relevant evidence is provided, those applications will fail and will not be assessed further. Applications that pass will be assessed up to 50% of the available maximum score).

Applications that pass stage A will then be further assessed against the following criteria:

- B. Previous experience of having provided audit services or other significant and relevant knowledge/experience of audit services; (30%)
- C. Evidence of previous experience of producing formal reports (15%)
- D. Evidence of having delivered training in a professional/legal setting (5%)

You should therefore ensure that your Expression of Interest addresses these criteria.

We are unlikely to progress more than a maximum of the top 5 applicants to full tender stage.

5. Expression of Interest

We invite any interested potential provider to lodge an expression of interest (no more than the equivalent of three sides of A4 in length), addressing criteria A-D above and setting out why you should be invited to tender in full.

Expressions of Interest must be submitted electronically to pthompson@optical.org

Should you have any questions regarding this invitation please put them in writing to pthompson@optical.org

The closing date for submissions is: **Monday 16 March 2020 (17:00)**