

Written Submission to the Health Select Committee Public Health Inquiry

Summary

1. The Health Professions Council (HPC) is pleased to make this submission to the Health Select Committee Public Health Inquiry. In light of the recommendation of the Scally review¹ and the Government's subsequent response, we have confined our submission to providing information, which we hope will be of assistance to the Committee, about the current administration's regulatory policy, our work as a multi-professional regulator and the initial stages of exploring voluntary registers.
2. In our submission to the Committee we have addressed issues surrounding the future of the public health workforce, including the regulation of public health professionals. Our submission specifically examines the implications of the White Paper Healthy Lives, Healthy People and the Command Paper 'Enabling Excellence – Autonomy and Accountability for Healthcare Workers, Social Workers and Social Care Workers' and how it will alter the current system of regulation.
3. The HPC is an independent UK-wide statutory regulator for 15 professions working in the NHS, education, the community and independent practice. We currently register over 210,000 registrants. Our focus is on the protection of the public and we do this by maintaining a register of professionals who meet established standards for training, professional skills, behaviour and health. HPC approves and upholds high standards of education and training whilst investigating complaints and taking appropriate action.

¹ p40 8.1

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_122089

White Paper Healthy Lives, Healthy People

4. The White Paper Healthy Lives, Healthy People outlines the Government's response to the review of the regulation of public health professionals by Dr Gabriel Scally. The Government has made clear in the White Paper that statutory regulation should be a last resort; its preferred approach is to ensure effective and independently-assured voluntary regulation for any unregulated public health specialists.

Command Paper Enabling Excellence – Autonomy and Accountability for Healthcare Workers and Social Care Workers

5. Additionally, in February 2011, the Government published the Command Paper 'Enabling Excellence – Autonomy and Accountability for Healthcare Workers, Social Workers and Social Care Workers'. This document sets out the current Government's policy on regulation, including its approach to extending regulation to new groups. In particular, it sets out the Government's policy that, in the future, statutory regulation will only be considered in 'exceptional circumstances' where there is a 'compelling case' and where voluntary registers, such as those maintained by professional bodies and other organisations, are not considered sufficient to manage the risk involved.

Voluntary Registers

6. The Department of Health's Review of Arm's-Length Bodies set out a number of changes for the Council of Healthcare Regulatory Excellence (CHRE) which include extending their remit to 'set standards for and quality assure voluntary registers.' Since the announcement was first made, we understand a number of groups who hold voluntary registers have contacted CHRE to express their interest in such a scheme including public health professionals.

HPC support the work of CHRE in exploring the various options of quality assured voluntary registers.

7. The HPC currently has no existing powers to set up any voluntary registers. Our work to date has been to consider the implications of the Bill and the Command Paper and in particular to begin to consider how and in what circumstances we might in the future exercise our discretionary powers to establish voluntary registers. We intend to agree the policy and process in this area over the course of this year before beginning to consider which groups might be suitable for voluntary registration. An impact assessment and consultation would then be required before reaching a final decision in respect of a specific group.
8. A voluntary register would mean that it would not be compulsory to become registered (and there would not be any titles or functions protected in law). However, over time, registration might become a requirement of employers and commissioners. Following its meeting on 31 March 2011 the Council has instructed the Executive to further explore the principles for establishing voluntary registers and consider working regulatory models which would govern the HPC's approach in this area. The Council will further discuss arrangements for undertaking this work in due course.

Cost-effective regulation

9. The Command Paper, sets out plans to move to a more proportionate and effective system that imposes the least possible costs and complexity, while maintaining safety and confidence for patients, service users, carers and the wider public. As a self-funding body, HPC offers cost effective regulation to a wide range of professions.

10. HPC continues to deliver efficient and economic professional regulation. As a multi-professional regulator the HPC benefits from economies of scale, meaning that the costs of regulation are proportionately lower compared to other organisations that only regulate a single profession. Over the last few years the HPC has continued to invest in new systems and processes, for example in online renewal of registration and the disposal by consent of fitness to practise cases, both of which have enabled cost control.