

Standards of conduct, performance and ethics Q&A

What are the Standards of conduct, performance and ethics?

The Standards of conduct, performance and ethics are the high level ethical standards published by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) for all the professionals we register. They set out in broad terms the behaviour we expect of them. They reflect both public expectations of professionals and the high standards that professionals expect of each other.

Why have we published revised Standards of conduct, performance and ethics?

It is important to ensure that our Standards remain up-to-date and well understood by registrants and the public. Having undertaken a comprehensive review of the Standards of conduct, performance and ethics (previously published in 2008) which involved gathering feedback from employers, registrants and service users and carers; we have now published a revised version which has been updated and is fit for purpose.

What was the process involved in reviewing the Standards?

At the start of the review we gathered feedback on previous Standards from a range of stakeholders, including employers and service users, through a combination of research activities, such as focus groups. We then convened a Professional Liaison Group (PLG), who helped us draft a revised version for consultation. The PLG had representation from professional bodies, education providers, and service users and carers. We publicly consulted on the draft revised Standards, using the responses to help us update them and produce a final version. This final version was then approved by Council in September 2015.

When do the Standards come into effect?

The Standards are effective as of their publication date on Tuesday 26 January 2016. Applicants applying for HCPC registration or for readmission to the Register will be asked to confirm that they have read, understood, meet and will continue to meet the Standards of conduct, performance and ethics.

How have the Standards changed?

The Standards of conduct, performance and ethics have a different structure and look. They have been laid out more simply in order to improve their accessibility, particularly to service users and carers.

The overall expectations remain much the same. However, there is now a dedicated standard about registrants reporting and escalating concerns that they might have about the safety and wellbeing of service users (standard 7). There is also a new standard about registrants being open and honest when things go wrong (standard 8).

Why is there a dedicated standard about reporting and escalating concerns?

During the review, we received significant feedback about the importance of registrants reporting any concerns they might have about the safety and wellbeing of service users. This feedback also highlighted that registrants should take action to follow-up on concerns wherever necessary.

Whilst previous Standards set out an expectation about raising concerns, we wanted to strengthen this requirement and ensure our expectation was as transparent as possible. We have also added a requirement for registrants to support others to raise concerns.

Why is there a new standard about being open and honest when things go wrong?

The report of the [Francis Inquiry](#) proposed that health and care professionals should have a 'duty of candour'. This means that they should be open and honest with service users and their carers when something has gone wrong with the care, treatment or other services they have provided to them.

Our previous Standards did not include a specific requirement about informing service users and their carers where mistakes or errors are made, therefore we have added a dedicated standard in relation to this. Registrants are expected to tell service users and carers when they become aware that something has gone wrong with the care, treatment or other services that they provide, and to take action to put matters right wherever possible. They are also required to consider making an apology and to make sure that the service user receives an explanation of what happened. (We have added a glossary entry for the term 'apology' which clarifies that we do not regard an apology, of itself, as an admission of liability or wrongdoing).

We have not used the term 'candour' as feedback heard during the review indicated that this term was not always well understood by our stakeholders, including registrants and service users and carers. Instead we have referred to registrants being 'open when things go wrong'.

Standard 2 features use of social media and networking websites. Where can I find more advice on this?

We have previously published some advice within an article included in our In Focus newsletter, entitled [Focus on standards - social networking sites](#). In 2016/17 we plan to develop, consult on and publish social media guidance for registrants.

Will the HCPC be updating its Guidance on conduct and ethics for students in line with the revised Standards of conduct, performance and ethics?

In light of the changes to our Standards of conduct, performance and ethics, we are currently in the process of [reviewing our Guidance on conduct and ethics for students](#). We anticipate that this revised guidance will be published in early summer 2016. [Existing guidance](#) will remain valid until the revised version is published.

How can education providers support students should they encounter issues whilst on placement?

Education providers are required to have adequate and accessible facilities to support the welfare and wellbeing of students in all settings. This may include having a whistle-blowing policy in place or offering guidance and resources (including the HCPC's Guidance on conduct and ethics for students) to enable them to understand how they can access support within their own context.

Standard 7.2 states that 'you must support and encourage others to report concerns'. What does this mean in practise and what is the extent of it?

This standard puts the onus on individuals to help create an environment for supporting others to raise issues. Regardless of your role or position within an organisation, it is incumbent on you to help create the right culture and the right environment. This may include signposting staff or colleagues to the different ways they can raise a concern; whether anonymously via external channels or through the various [helplines available](#).

In considering the current austerity climate of cost-cutting and reduced staffing levels, do you envisage seeing a rise in reports of concerns about the safety of patients and service users?

The HCPC has not been made aware of any shift in relation to the number of reports of concerns about safety. We are committed to working with organisations such as the Care Quality Commission (CQC), and those regulators who are involved with systems and services, in order to monitor any reports of concerns about safety. Our advice to registrants is that if you or your colleagues become aware of a situation, please do raise this with the [relevant channels](#).

Do fitness to practise (FtP) panel members use the standards to guide them in determining a registrant's fitness to practise? Will panel members be given further training in line with the revised standards?

The revised Standards of conduct, performance and ethics are [central to the FtP process](#) and can assist panel members in making appropriate decisions in relation to a registrant's [fitness to practise](#). All of our partners, including [FtP panel members](#), will go through a continual training process to ensure that they are updated on any new developments and how this may affect their role.

Standard 8.1 encourages openness and honesty when things go wrong, including considering an apology. How can an organisation's need to look effective be managed alongside this professional obligation?

It is important that organisations understand the importance of being open and honest. Our work with service users indicated that an apology was important to them, however organisations should understand that an apology is not an admission of liability. The HCPC will continue to work closely with stakeholders, including

professional bodies and employers, to communicate this message to the organisations that we engage with.

Is the HCPC supportive of registrants using social media as a communication tool?

We are supportive of our registrants using social media and would want them to maximum its use but in a way that is responsible and appropriate. We would encourage registrants to consider how they use social media and to think about the messages that they may be posting. Social media is a tool for communication, similar to writing a letter or sending an e-mail, and we would therefore expect registrants to use it appropriately and responsibly.

How would you reduce any anxiety from registrants and employers around using social media?

We hope that the decision to refer to social media specifically within our standards will begin to stimulate conversation about its benefits as a communication tool. There can be a perception that social media is an increasingly common feature within fitness to practise cases, and that using it may land you in trouble. In reality, cases linked to social media use come up very rarely. We hope that our social media guidance, to be developed this year, will help to alleviate any concerns or anxieties over using social media.

Will you be producing any public-facing literature about the revised standards?

We are planning to publish a public-facing guide to the revised standards this autumn. This guide will explain in very clear terms what patients, service users and carers can expect of our registrants.