

Professional Liaison Groups operating manual

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Reference documents

From the Key Decisions Document:

7. Professional advice

In your comments on the Council's proposals relating to professional advice, you were strongly supportive of the principles underpinning its proposals to establish Professional Liaison Groups (PLGs).

The Council has therefore decided that both the Council and its committees will be able to establish PLGs, primarily to provide advice on strategic and planning issues. It has decided that all PLGs will be project based, that they will have a flexible format, that they will have a defined lifespan for specific purposes, and that each PLG will always have:

- A rationale (a 'mission statement')
- Terms of reference
- A plan of activities
- A timetable
- A budget

The Council thinks it is important to retain as much flexibility as it can, because of the variety of issues on which it might want to seek advice. In particular, it has decided that the membership of a PLG should vary depending on its needs. Therefore, a PLG may need members who can provide expert opinion, members who represent organisations or a combination. Equally, a PLG's membership may need to be uni-professional or multi-professional, and it may need to be supplemented by educational institution representatives, employer representatives, patient/client/user representatives, lay members, or other representatives or experts. The convenor of a PLG will normally be a Council Member.

Introduction

The Council has decided to allow for the creation of professional liaison groups (PLGs), primarily so as to offer advice on strategic issues.

Forming professional liaison groups

PLGs will always be formed on a project basis: this means that they will have a specific task or set of tasks to accomplish and a defined lifespan. They will always be set up by either the Council or one of its committees (with the ratification of Council). The Council or the Committee setting up each PLG will act as that PLG’s sponsor. The sponsor will be responsible for the work of the PLG.

The following guidelines apply when sponsors set up and establish the terms of reference of a PLG:

Sponsor	Council approval required?	Budget
Council	Not applicable	As agreed by Council
Statutory committee	Yes	As agreed by Council
Non-statutory committee	Yes	As agreed by Council

Requirements for all professional liaison groups

All PLGs must always have:

- A rationale (a ‘mission statement’)
- Terms of reference
- A plan of activities (a project plan completed on a standard template)
- A timetable

The rationale must explain, clearly and concisely, the purpose of the PLG. The Council believes that it is important that it explains its actions as clearly as possible. It will therefore encourage sponsors to:

- use a ‘mission statement’ format
- limit themselves to a single sentence of no more than 30 words
- follow the Plain English Campaign’s guidelines

when creating rationales.

There must be terms of reference:

- for the PLG as a whole
- for the members of the PLG

The overall terms of reference must explain what the PLG will seek to do. The terms must be drawn tightly enough so that it will be clear when a PLG is acting outside its remit.

The individual terms of reference must explain what will be expected of individual members when joining the PLG. Members will be expected to sign up to these terms before starting work, and may be asked to leave a PLG by the convenor or the sponsor if they consistently work outside their individual terms.

The timetable must include key milestones. This is particularly important for PLGs whose expected lifespan is more than six months. The timetable must also clearly state when reports will be made to the sponsor. As a rule of thumb, there should not be more than a three month delay between reports.

Membership of professional liaison groups

The body setting up the PLG must decide the appropriate membership. It must do so by considering the skills, knowledge and experience that will be needed by the PLG to complete its task, and then drawing up a list of requirements for members and any recommendations for the recruitment process.

Recommendations for the recruitment process might include suggesting organisations that should be approached to put forward a potential PLG member. The process will always be run separately from other recruitment processes used by the Council, such as recruitment of Partners.

The body setting up the PLG must also decide the appointment of the PLG's convenor (the person who will run the PLG). This will usually be a Council Member, unless there is good reason to choose differently.

The Council has deliberately chosen to allow PLGs to draw members from a wide range of sources, so that each PLG can be tailored to suit the needs of the project it is tasked with. The Council decided that people drawn from each of the following groups could be eligible, in principle, to sit on a PLG, depending on its needs:

- Professions regulated by the Council
- Education and training institutions
- Other health professionals
- Employers
- Lay people (that is, people not belonging to a health profession). The project requirements will determine which lay people, if any, might be asked to serve. A PLG's lay members might include, among others, Lay Members of Council, non-professionals working within health or social care settings, patient/client/user representatives, government officials or specialists such as medical ethicists, all depending on project requirements.

The Council may ask for nominations or recommendations from organisations including professional bodies, HEIs, employers and others. Lay membership is not excluded where appropriate.

Costs of professional liaison groups

- Members of Council participating in a PLG will receive an attendance allowance (as appropriate) and expenses.
- Representatives of other bodies appointed to serve on a PLG will have their expenses reimbursed by the Council but will not be eligible to receive an attendance allowance.

Disbanding professional liaison groups

PLGs will be disbanded in the following circumstances:

- On the planned end date (this will be the norm)
- Before the planned end date
 - At the behest of the sponsor
 - At the request of the PLG and with the agreement of the sponsor
 - At the behest of the Council
- After the planned end date
 - At the behest of the sponsor and with the agreement of the Council
 - At the behest of the PLG and with the agreement of the sponsor and the Council

Where PLGs are disbanded either before or after the planned end date, this will typically be the result of a change in the project requirements. Of course, if a PLG departs from its terms of reference without the

approval of its sponsor, or there are other problems with its running, it can also be disbanded. Clearly, the Council and its committees will try to be careful to avoid such problems as far as possible when setting up PLGs.

Auditing professional liaison groups

Each PLG's sponsor is accountable to Council for ensuring that the PLG keeps to its terms of reference and that nothing untoward happens. Where a PLG and its sponsor agree to changes in the terms of reference, they must report their actions to the Council. PLG convenors will have individual responsibility for their group's work, and PLG members will have individual responsibility for their actions. The Audit Committee can provide advice on monitoring arrangements for projects on an *ad hoc* basis, and may issue standing guidance as well.

Appendix: template for PLG project plans

Appendix: example of terms of reference

PROFESSIONAL LIAISON GROUP: Continuing Professional Development PLG

PLG MEMBER ROLE: Legal advisor

PLG DURATION: February 2003 to July 2003

MAIN PURPOSE OF ROLE

To help the establishment of a CPD scheme by the Health Professions Council by providing legal advice, including advising on the limits of the Council's powers in relation to CPD.

POSITION

- Responsible to convenor for PLG-related matters
- Responsible to employer for other matters
- Must liaise with other PLG members as needed

SCOPE OF ROLE

DIMENSIONS & LIMITS OF AUTHORITY

ROLE-HOLDER:..... CONVENOR: