

**Health Professions Council
1 March 2006**

**Proposed Scheme to Council for HPC's Response to the Race Relations
(Amendment) Act**

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Introduction

At the Finance and Resources Committee meeting on 20th September, approval was given for further external advice to be sought about HPC's specific obligations under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act ("the Act") and how best to address these. A proposal for a scheme was then to be developed by the Executive Management Team, and presented to the Finance and Resources Committee in February 2006.

A proposed Equality and Diversity Scheme was developed (attached), and first priorities in terms of action areas were suggested. These were approved by the Committee, and are consequently now being presented to Council for approval.

The Executive Management Team is currently in the process of developing strategies and timetables to address the Scheme and obligations under the Act. Following an initial risk assessment which was conducted by the Executive Management Team, the three areas below were proposed as those in need of most immediate attention:

1. Fitness to Practise Department;
2. International Registrations Department; and
3. Communications Department.

The reasons for these areas being the key areas that Fitness to Practise allegations and applications for overseas professionals to practice in the UK, have been the focus of claims by ethnic minority groups. In particular, the ways in which allegations and applications are made by people, marketed to people, and processed. For example, forms have been found to be more "user friendly" to people with less English skills, than letters when making allegations.

The Communications Department is also seen as a key priority due to the need to demonstrate that HPC is targeting their media strategies and campaigns at people from minority groups, and increasing the provision of information about regulation to people in these groups.

It was proposed that although the Scheme and the Act's typically take a 3 – 5 year period to fully implement and address, the above areas should be actioned as the first priority in

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HPC's response to the Act during 2006/2007. The process will be for the Directors of each Department to research strategies used by other organizations, and the Information and Information Technology Department to develop any necessary computer systems. Subsequent amendments to forms, documentation and policies will then be developed as appropriate.

Decision

Council is asked to agree the following:

- Approval of the proposed Equality and Diversity Scheme; and
- Approval of the proposed plan of action by HPC to target the areas of Fitness to Practice, International Registrations and Communications as a first priority.

Background information

None

Resource implications

None

Financial implications

None at this stage, however, following approval of the Scheme and consequent development of a detailed strategy, the financial impact of implementing the strategy will be presented to the Finance and Resources Committee.

Appendices

Equality and Diversity Scheme attached

Date of paper

1st March 2006.

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Appendix 1 – Enclosure 6/Paper HPC6/06

HEALTH PROFESSIONS COUNCIL

Equality and Diversity Scheme

Introduction

The Health Professions Council (HPC) is the statutory regulator of thirteen health professions. Its primary function is to protect the public and it does so by:

- setting standards;
- approving programmes of education and training;
- registering health professionals; and
- investigating and adjudicating allegations about their fitness to practise.

In the course of doing so HPC interacts with a diverse range of people, including:

- the public, especially complainants or witnesses in fitness to practise proceedings;
- registrants and potential registrants;
- education and training providers;
- health care providers, professional bodies, consumer groups and other partner organisations;
- its employees and the “partners” who carry out tasks on its behalf.

Equality and diversity

HPC is committed to preventing discrimination, valuing diversity and achieving equality of opportunity in all that it does. This Equality and Diversity Scheme (‘the Scheme’) sets out the principles which HPC applies to make equality and diversity key elements of the way it works, in order to:

- develop and sustain a diverse workforce;

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- create an environment in which everyone is able to work effectively and without having to face discrimination;
- provide a service that recognises, respects and responds to the diversity of the health professionals it regulates and the public it serves and protects.

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 places a duty on public authorities like HPC to promote race equality. Under the Act HPC, in performing its functions, must aim to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination;
- promote equal opportunities;
- promote good relations between people from different racial groups.

The Scheme goes beyond requirements of that Act and uses its principles as a framework to promote equality in relation to:

- disability
- gender
- sexual orientation
- religion and belief
- age.

Objectives

HPC is committed to ensuring that equality and diversity underpin all of its service and employment practices. At all levels of planning and service provision HPC will consider all in the community, whatever their race, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability or religion, to

- ensure that those who may be socially excluded are able to make use of the services of, and opportunities within, HPC;
- promote social inclusion by recognising and valuing individual differences and treating others with dignity and respect;

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- by valuing diversity, gain access to a wider pool of knowledge, skills and experience;
- motivate employees by adopting an inclusive management approach;
- work towards HPC's culture valuing diversity in everything it does.

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Employment practices

HPC will treat all employees and anyone who applies for employment fairly and equally.

HPC will recruit on the basis of the objective criteria which properly reflect the skills and abilities needed for the job in question and will select candidates solely on the basis of merit.

HPC will provide its employees with equal access to training, development and promotion opportunities and will encourage all employees to take advantage of such opportunities. Promotion decisions will be taken on the basis of ability, or demonstrated potential, to do the job.

HPC will manage its employees fairly and appropriately, ensuring that there is no unlawful discrimination on any grounds in relation to employment activities such as work allocation, consultation and communication, appraisal, granting of leave, grievance or disciplinary matters.

HPC will provide a work environment in which employees are free from harassment and victimisation.

HPC will ensure that all employees are given appropriate training in equality and diversity and understand their responsibilities under relevant laws and policies.

Specific equality policies

Set out below are HPC's specific equality policies, which are the:

Race Equality Policy; *(insert website link when Scheme approved)*

Disability Equality Policy; *(insert website link when Scheme approved)*

Gender and Sexual Equality Policy; *(insert website link when Scheme approved)*

Religion and Belief Equality Policy; and *(insert website link when Scheme approved)*

Age Equality Policy. *(insert website link when Scheme approved)*

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RACE EQUALITY POLICY

This policy is specific to issues relating to race and ethnicity.

The Race Relations Act 1976 makes it unlawful, without justification, to discriminate on grounds of race and, as amended by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 places a duty on public authorities to promote race equality.

HPC is committed to providing equal access to employment and the services it provides and will not discriminate on the grounds of race, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, cultural background or religion (where the religion is defined as a racial group).

HPC will:

- work with representatives of ethnic and racial groups to ensure that HPC's services meet their needs and to improve access to those services;
- promote access to information, services and decision-making through, the use of translation and interpretation services;
- welcome and encourage job applications from people from ethnic minority backgrounds;
- ensure that allegations of racial discrimination and harassment are investigated thoroughly, speedily and with sensitivity.

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DISABILITY EQUALITY POLICY

This policy is specific to issues relating to disability.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 applies to HPC in its capacity as an employer, service provider and the “qualifying body” for those it regulates. The Act makes it unlawful, without justification, to disabled people less favourably or to subject them to discrimination or harassment.

The Act defines disability as a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect upon a person’s ability to carry out normal day to day activities but HPC also recognises that society’s attitudes towards disabled people are one of the main barriers to ensuring that disabled people have equal rights of access to services and employment.

HPC is committed to providing equal access to employment and the services it provides and will not discriminate on the grounds of disability.

The HPC will:

- work with representatives of disabled people to ensure that HPC’s services meet their needs and to improve access to those services;
- promote access to information, services and decision-making through, for example, the use of interpretation for the hearing impaired, the use of Braille etc.
- ensure that, so far as possible, HPC events are held in premises which have appropriate facilities for disabled people;
- welcome and encourage job applications from disabled people;
- undertake wherever possible, to retain employees who experience disability, by making reasonable changes to their duties or working environment;
- ensure that allegations of discrimination and harassment on the grounds of disability are investigated thoroughly, speedily and with sensitivity.

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GENDER AND SEXUAL EQUALITY POLICY

This policy is specific to the concerns of men, women, bi-sexual people, gay men, lesbian women, transgender people and those who are undergoing or who have undergone gender re-assignment.

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 makes it unlawful to discriminate without justification on grounds of gender and the Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999 extend the protection provided by that Act to those undergoing or who have undergone gender reassignment.

HPC is committed to providing equal access to employment and the services it provides and will not discriminate on the grounds of gender, gender reassignment or sexual orientation.

HPC will:

- work with representatives of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender people to ensure that HPC's services meet their needs and to improve access to those services;
- confront homophobic attitudes, behaviour and language and encourage understanding of individual rights and attributes;
- encourage a culture of openness about sexual orientation and gender whilst maintaining the right to privacy;
- ensure men and women are paid the same for doing work of equal value and that flexible working policies apply equally to men and women, enabling them to make personal choices about their parenting, caring and work roles.
- ensure that allegations of discrimination and harassment on the grounds of gender, gender reassignment or sexual orientation are investigated thoroughly, speedily and with sensitivity.

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RELIGION AND BELIEF EQUALITY POLICY

This policy is specific to the concerns of people from different faith groups.

The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 make it unlawful to discriminate without justification, on grounds of religion or belief by treating a person less favourably or subjecting them to victimisation or harassment.

HPC is committed to providing equal access to employment and the services it provides and will not discriminate on the grounds of religion or belief.

HPC will:

- ensure cultural and religious festivals, holidays and rights of worship are acknowledged and recognised across the organisation;
- where reasonably practical, ensure events and hearings are not scheduled on cultural or religious festivals so as to prevent people from attending;
- ensure leave is not unreasonably withheld from employees who may wish to celebrate cultural and religious festivals;
- not impose dress restrictions on employees which may be discriminatory, unless such restrictions can be objectively justified in terms of meeting a legitimate health and safety or business aim;
- ensure that allegations of discrimination and harassment on the grounds of religion or belief are investigated thoroughly, speedily and with sensitivity.

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AGE EQUALITY POLICY

This policy is specific to the concerns of people of all ages and in particular younger and older people.

Age discrimination occurs because assumptions are made about older and younger people that are based on inaccurate, outdated and inappropriate stereotypes.

HPC is committed to providing equal access to employment and the services it provides and will not discriminate on the grounds of age.

HPC will:

- encourage and support activity to which is aimed at eliminating ageist attitudes and practices;
- ensure that, in providing its services, it identifies and addresses the specific needs of different age groups, particularly older people and children;
- seek to employ a mixed-age workforce that includes older and younger people;
- where circumstances permit, support members employees who wish to work beyond the mandatory retirement age of 65, in order to retain their knowledge, skills and experience in a manner which benefits both parties;
- ensure that allegations of discrimination and harassment on the grounds of age are investigated thoroughly, speedily and with sensitivity.

For any queries or further information about the Scheme, please contact HPC's Human Resources Department on 0207 840 9730 or email recruitment@hpc-uk.org.

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