

Education and Training Committee, 10 June 2008

Consultation on standards of proficiency and the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register for hearing aid audiologists

Executive summary and recommendations

Introduction

Amendments have recently been made to the Health and Social Care Bill which is currently before the UK Parliament. If that legislation is enacted then, subject to the making and approval of an Order under section 60 of the Health Act 1999, the Hearing Aid Council will be abolished and responsibility for the registration of hearing aid audiologists will be transferred to the Health Professions Council. We currently anticipate that a new part of the Register for hearing aid audiologists will open in April 2009.

The attached paper outlines the background to the proposed regulation of hearing aid audiologists by the HPC, and outlines proposals to consult on standards of proficiency, the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register and changes to the registration and fees rules.

We are proposing to consult in conjunction with the Hearing Aid Council on the standards of proficiency and the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register.

The regulation of hearing aid audiologists is dependent upon the legislative timetable. Therefore the timescales outlined in this paper are subject to change.

Decision

The Committee is invited to agree and to recommend to the Council:

- to consult in conjunction with the Hearing Aid Council on the standards of proficiency; and to consult in conjunction with the Hearing Aid Council on a proposal that the threshold level of qualification for entry to the hearing aid audiologists part of the Register should be set at a foundation degree; and
- to consult on a proposal that the HPC (Registration and Fees) Rules be amended to provide for the registration renewal cycle for hearing aid audiologists.

Background information

Article 14 (a) of the Order provides that

The Education and Training Committee shall advise the Council (whether on the request of the Council or otherwise) on the performance of the Council's functions in relation to—

- (a) the establishing of standards of proficiency under article 5 and its other functions under that article*
- (b) the establish of standards and requirements in respect of education and training or continuing professional development, as the case may be, under articles 15 (1) and 19 (4) and (6)*

Resource implications

- Providing input to the Hearing Aid Council on the standards of proficiency, drafting, providing input into the consultation document and undertaking and providing input into the responses analysis
- Editing and arranging for the printing of standards of proficiency for hearing aid audiologists and reprinting of the standards of education and training (as appropriate).

These implications are accounted for in the Policy and Standards workplan for 2008/2009.

Financial implications

- Printing standards of proficiency
- Printing standards of education and training

These implications are accounted for in the Policy and Standards budget for 2008/2009.

Appendices

None

Date of paper

29 May 2008

Consultation on standards of proficiency and the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register for hearing aid audiologists

Introduction

The Hearing Aid Council (HAC) is the statutory body that is responsible for setting standards of professional training, performance and conduct for individuals and companies involved in the assessment of hearing loss and subsequent sale of hearing aids.

The HAC holds a register of hearing aid audiologists.¹ Only someone registered with HAC is legally entitled to sell a hearing aid. Amendments to the Health and Social Care Bill have recently been made which, if enacted, will enable the HAC to be dissolved and responsibility for the registration of hearing aid audiologists to be transferred to the Health Professions Council. We currently anticipate that a new part of the Register for hearing aid audiologists will open in April 2009.

The other functions of the HAC are expected to be transferred to a variety of other bodies, including the Office of Fair Trading.

The Council now needs to undertake work in order to establish the standards of proficiency for hearing aid audiologists and to set the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register. The Council also needs to amend the Health Professions Council (Registration and Fees) Rules Order of Council 2003 in order to set the renewal cycle for hearing aid audiologists.

Article 3 (14) of the Order requires the Council to consult before establishing any standards and Article 41(3) requires it to consult before making rules.

Standards of proficiency

Article 5 (2) of the Health Professions Order 2001 (“the Order”) says:

(2) The Council shall from time to time—

- a) establish the standards of proficiency necessary to be admitted to the different parts of the register being the standards it considers necessary for safe and effective practice under that part of the register*

This means that we must publish standards for each of the professions that we regulate which are the ‘necessary’ or ‘threshold’ that we consider to be essential for safe and effective practice.

¹ This paper uses the term ‘Hearing Aid Audiologists’. It is anticipated that both that title and the title ‘Hearing Aid Dispenser’ will be protected titles.

Putting together the standards of proficiency

In the past, the Council has taken a pragmatic approach to putting together standards of proficiency for new professions. This has taken into account any existing work undertaken by professional bodies to draft standards.

In 2004, the standards of proficiency for operating department practitioners were put together by the Association of Operating Department Practitioners (now the College of Operating Department Practitioners) in liaison with the HPC Executive. A HPC consultation was then held on the draft standards, following which finalised standards were published in time for the opening of the Register.

In September 2007, the Council established a Professional Liaison Group (PLG) to establish standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists. A HPC consultation was held on the draft standards from November 2007.

The HAC has undertaken work with professional bodies in the field, and other stakeholders, to put together draft standards of proficiency for hearing aid audiologists. A member of the Executive has attended meetings held by the HAC and provided input into the development of the standards. As the HAC has undertaken substantial work in putting together draft standards of proficiency, the Executive proposes that it would not be necessary to establish a Professional Liaison Group (PLG).

The Executive proposes that the consultation on the draft standards of proficiency should be held in conjunction with the HAC. It is presently anticipated that the HAC would arrange the mailing of the consultation document, and take a lead in analysing consultation responses.

The Council would not normally consult in conjunction with another organisation. However, the regulation of hearing aid audiologists is unusual in that it involves a transfer of functions from one statutory regulator to another. Consulting in conjunction with the HAC on the standards would recognise the expertise the HAC has in developing standards for hearing aid audiologists, and the expertise of the HPC Council and executive in drafting and publishing standards of proficiency.

The final decisions on the text of the standards of proficiency following consultation would be taken by the Education and Training Committee and Council.

Standards of education and training

Standard one of the standards of education and training ("SET 1") sets out the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register in the professions we regulate. This is articulated as a threshold academic award. Every time we open a new part of the Register, we need to determine the threshold level of qualification for entry for the new profession, following consultation, and add this to the standards.

In the past, most entrants to the HAC Register have successfully passed an examination set by the HAC, followed by the successful completion of 850 hours of supervised practice. Applicants for this route are employed by a registered employer, with a supervisor who is responsible for their training. The last examinations will be held in 2008. After this date, the only route on to the HAC Register will be successful completion of an approved programme.

The HAC approves programmes delivered by Aston University, De Montford University, University College London, University of Manchester and University of Swansea. The academic awards of these qualifications vary from Foundation degree to a Masters of Science degree. HAC previously publicly consulted on changing the threshold education and training route to a foundation degree.

The Executive proposes that the Council consult in conjunction with the HAC on a proposal that the threshold level of qualification for the hearing aid audiologists part of the Register should be set at a foundation degree. If agreed following consultation, the wording in SET 1 would read:

“Foundation degree for hearing aid audiologists”

Amendment to rules

We also propose to consult on proposed amendments to the Health Professions Council (Registration and Fees) Rules Order of Council 2003. The amendment would set the renewal cycle for hearing aid audiologists in preparation for their joining the Register.

Amendments to rules are the responsibility of the Council.

Timescales

The standards of proficiency will not be ready for consideration at the 10 June 2008 meeting of the Education and Training Committee. Therefore the Committee is invited today to agree:

- to consult in conjunction with the Hearing Aid Council on the standards of proficiency;
- to consult in conjunction with the Hearing Aid Council on a proposal that the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register should be set at a foundation degree; and
- to consult on a proposal that the HPC (Registration and Fees) Rules be amended to provide for the registration renewal cycle for hearing aid audiologists.

The Committee is invited to recommend the above to the Council.

At its meeting on 3 July 2008, the Council will be asked to agree to consult in conjunction with the Hearing Aid Council on standards of proficiency and the threshold level of qualification for entry to the hearing aid audiologists part of the

Register, and consult on proposed amendments to the Health Professions Council (Registration and Fees) Order of Council 2003. The Council will also be asked to agree the text of the consultation documents. A consultation would then be held for three months between July and October 2008.

The outcomes of the consultation on the standards of proficiency and threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register will be brought back to the Education and Training Committee and Council at their meetings on 2 December 2008 and 11 December 2008. The Council will additionally consider the outcome of the consultation on the proposed rule amendments at its December 2008 meeting.