

Consultation on fees
Policy and Standards Department
Health and Care Professions Council
Park House
184-186 Kennington Park Road
London SE11 4BU

14 December 2018

Dear Sir/Madam

On behalf of the AHPF Board, I am pleased to respond to the HCPC's Consultation on registration fees. Individual professional bodies are also responding separately and you will be aware the AHPF was a co-signatory on the open letter from the BPS and others on 29 November.

Before responding on the questions, I would like to point out that some of the questions have been framed in way that makes them difficult to answer and could skew responses. Some are based on issues of principle with which it is difficult to disagree and therefore complicates the points we would like to make about fees and resources, for example question 2. Others, split issues across a number of questions eg questions 5, 7 and 8, so I have indicated below where the main points of our answers appear.

Q1 Do you agree that the HCPC should invest in preventing fitness to practise issues arising?

We are unsure how far the HCPC has fully explored and projected the impact of the loss of social workers from its statutory regulation responsibilities. It also is unclear whether and how far the increase over recent years in the volume of FtP business is primarily related to the number of social workers that the HCPC currently regulates and the greater proportion of FtP cases relating to this profession.

The AHPF is also concerned that the HCPC's prevention agenda may be straying beyond their brief of protecting the public. Research on regulators' duties has found that the more responsibilities they take on, the less effective they may be on their core functions. We would encourage the HCPC to focus on the public protection agenda. In addition, the consultation is clear that the HCPC wants to work on improving its internal processes and delivering timeline standards that they can work to, so we think efforts are better focussed on this rather extending into new areas of activity.

Q2 Do you agree that the HCPC should invest in improved services?

The AHPF is not convinced by the HCPC's arguments for further investment. They have not demonstrated what they are going to do to reduce costs given they will no longer be regulating social workers.

The consultation suggests further investment is needed to develop the appropriate systems and processes to use data more intelligently. The AHPF would like to see more about how the HCPC

proposes it can be more useful in how it gathers, uses and shares data relating to the profile of registrants, trends and links between different aspects of registrants' engagement with their registration.

The consultation also suggests further investment will be used to better engage with service users. However although the largest group of service users is the public, the proposals focus on targeted engagement with organisations.

We would support a full appraisal of how the HCPC can best deploy its available resource (after losing social workers) to fulfil its regulatory functions and service delivery most effectively and efficiently.

Q3 Do you agree that the HCPC should invest in the necessary resources to improve the capacity, quality and timeliness of our FtP performance?

While welcoming the HCPC's commitment to improving this process, the AHPF encourages the HCPC to consider further, what more it could do and whether the transfer of responsibility for registration of social workers to Social Work England will provide further opportunities to streamline this process.

We think there is more the HCPC could do to reduce the length of time taken to consider cases. Professional bodies are aware of cases where it has taken up to 7 years to hear an outcome. Equally, professional bodies are concerned about whether this process provides effective public safety.

The AHPF Board remains concerned that more could also be done to reduce costs. For example, the AHPF understands that the whole investigating panel will frequently travel to the location of the registrant concerned, which cannot be a cost effective use of limited resources. There have been some concerns raised recently about the level of investment in refurbishment of facilities and entertainment costs which seem excessive, given the HCPC's priorities and costs to registrants.

The AHPF understands the HCPC is proposing to start a consultation on the financial costs of current panels with educators, employers, registrants, students and service users and we welcome this.

Q4 Do you agree that the renewal fee should increase from £90 to £106 to support the proposals outlined in this consultation document?

No. NHS and social care salaries for registrants have only increased between 1-2% across the UK in the last year or so and yet HCPC are proposing an increase of almost 18%. In addition, the AHPF has issues with the premise that the registrants should bear costs but have little voice in the financial management of the HCPC organisation. We recognise that the HCPC will remain the cheapest of regulators however this needs to reflect the average income of AHPs, cost of living factors and costs to new entrants to the professions including student loans.

If the HCPC Council decides to proceed with this increase as a result of this consultation, the AHPF will consider whether to intervene and object when it comes before Parliament for approval.

Q5 Do you agree that the scrutiny fee for applicants from approved programmes should increase in line with the renewal fee from £63 to £74?

We can see a logic in increasing each of the HCPC's fees by the same percentage. However, we have concerns about the size of the percentage increase, the impact of the individual fee increase proposals, and the particular impact of the increase to this fee combined with the proposed cessation of the graduate discount for the first two years of practice (see our response to question 6).

Q6 Do you agree that graduate applicants should no longer receive a 50 per cent discount on the cost of registration?

The AHPF is not convinced about the arguments for discontinuing this. Simply saying that it is an anomaly and there are no other discounts is not a valid argument for stopping it. There are equally arguments for retaining it, eg the start-up costs for new graduates which may include relocation, investment in equipment and other expenses. This increase may put off individual graduates from securing registration or encourage them to defer it, which would negatively impact on workforce supply.

Q7 Do you agree that the restoration and readmission fees should also increase in line with the increase in our registration renewal fee?

It seems reasonable, as a point of principle, that each of the HCPC's registration fees should be adjusted at the same time and in a proportionate way. However, as indicated in our response to question 4 that we do not see that a single increase of almost 18% to any of the fees is proportionate. The AHPF thinks there is an issue of fairness here. A blanket fee for re-joining the Register whatever the circumstances does not seem appropriate. We assume the HCPC's regulatory costs for readmitting those previously struck off the register are much higher than those returning to practice.

Q8 Do you agree that the international and grandparenting scrutiny fees should increase in line with the increase in our registration renewal fee?

We have concerns about the already high level of the international application fee, which would be compounded by the proposed increase. This could have the effect of deterring overseas-qualified practitioners seeking registration to practise in the UK just at the time when we need more workforce supply to meet demand.

Q9. Do you agree that we should regularly review our fees to avoid infrequent but larger increases in the future?

Many professional bodies increase membership fees by a small percentage each year. The AHPF would suggest that if the HCPC followed a similar process it would be more manageable and affordable for registrants.

Q10 Do you agree that we should investigate additional charging models for services including charging for the approval of education programmes?

We are concerned about the suggestion that the HCPC should introduce a charge for approving education programmes. In particular, we have a strong concern that some of the fee levels included in the modelling would have the effect of eroding professional bodies' quality assurance and enhancement

role because education providers would not be able to afford both sets of fees (and HCPC approval is clearly essential for programmes to run).

While having a significant impact on the role of professional bodies themselves, this would impact negatively on how the HCPC is enabled to undertake its education approval role, given its reliance as a multi-professional regulator on the role that professional bodies play. In turn, this would impact on how the quality of education programmes that lead to eligibility for admission to the register is assured, and put the HCPC's fulfilment of its public protection role at risk.

Q11 Do you agree that a higher fee should be charged for those who request paper renewal forms?

We would see this as potentially discriminatory to individuals who did not have access to, or were not enabled to engage with the HCPC's online processes. We would therefore expect the HCPC to undertake a full equality impact analysis to test out the potential, unintended consequences for registrants who sought to register through engaging with the regulatory through paper-based forms.

Q12 Do you consider there are any aspects of our proposals that could result in equality and diversity implications for groups or individuals based on one or more of the following protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and equivalent Northern Irish legislation?

As indicated in our response to question 11, we would see it as potentially not in line with equality and diversity principles to charge a higher fee to registrants who sought to use paper renewal forms.

We think that the combined effect of the proposals to increase the scrutiny fee for UK graduates and to remove the discounted registration renewal fee for the first two years of registration will have equality and diversity implications for individuals from poorer backgrounds and for graduates starting their professional career with higher levels of student debt. This runs the risk of individuals choosing not to enter the profession for which they have qualified for financial reasons.

We would also question whether charging the same fee to individuals seeking to return to the register after a lapse in registration as individuals seeking restoration to the register is neither consistent with the workload involved for the HCPC, nor in line with equality and diversity principles, since the former is more likely to apply to female registrants seeking to return after extended maternity leave than to male registrants.

We see the proposed increase to the international application fee as disproportionately high. This could negatively affect individuals from poorer backgrounds and countries.

Q13 Do you have any further comments on our proposals?

We have a number of concerns about some underlying premises in this consultation:

- That registrants should bear costs but have no say in the financial management of the organisation
- That the HCPC has not advised registrants of this consultation and proposed increase
- That this fee increase is being proposed at a time where there is no President appointed

Consequently the AHPF is considering writing to the Minister, Caroline Dinenage with these concerns. In addition we are concerned about the Government's decision to create a new regulator (for Social Workers) which is wholly against longstanding government policy to streamline regulatory arrangements.

The AHPF is also considering approaching and writing to AHP registrant members on the HCPC Council to explain our concerns.

We look forward to seeing the outcome of this consultation and please contact the AHPF at the address below if you have any questions about any of these responses.

Yours sincerely,



Parmjit Dhanda
AHPF Chair