

Council – 29 March 2012

Consultation on the registration cycle for social workers in England –  
consultation analysis

Executive summary and recommendations

### **Introduction**

Following the government's announcement that the regulation of social workers in England will be transferred to the Health Professions Council (HPC) in 2012, we consulted between 7 December 2011 and 29 February 2012 on the proposed registration cycle for social workers in England.

The Health and Social Care Bill currently before Parliament provides for the transfer of the regulation of social workers in England from the General Social Care Council (GSCC) to the Health Professions Council (HPC) which, under the terms of the Bill, will be renamed the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).<sup>1</sup>

In our consultation we sought the views of stakeholders on setting the registration cycle for social workers in England as part of our preparatory work before opening the Register for the profession. We proposed that dependent upon the passage and timing of the necessary legislation, the end date of the renewal cycle for social workers in England should be 30 November in even numbered years.

The attached paper document summarises the responses we received to the consultation. The results of this consultation will feed into the Department of Health's drafting of a consequential provisions order, which will make consequential legislative changes associated with the transfer of the GSCC register of social workers to the HPC.

### **Decision**

The Council is invited to discuss and approve the attached consultation response document and decision.

### **Background information**

Council paper, 6 December 2011, enclosure 6 at [www.hpc-uk.org/aboutus/committees/archive/index.asp?id=537](http://www.hpc-uk.org/aboutus/committees/archive/index.asp?id=537).

### **Resource implications**

The resource implications of adding the registration renewal date for social workers in England to our rules will be covered by the Department of Health which will draft the necessary amendment to our rules in a consequential provisions order.

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<sup>1</sup> The paper refers to the 'HPC' throughout, rather than the 'Health and Care Professions Council' for consistency and clarity.

**Financial implications**

The resource implications of adding the registration renewal date for social workers in England to our rules will be covered by the Department of Health which will draft the necessary amendment to our rules in a consequential provisions order.

**Appendices**

None

**Date of paper**

19 March 2012

**DRAFT – SUBJECT TO HPC COUNCIL  
DISCUSSION/APPROVAL 29/03/2012**

**Consultation on the registration cycle for social workers in  
England**

**Analysis of responses to the consultation on the registration cycle for  
social workers in England, and our decisions resulting from responses  
received**

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DRAFT FOR HPC COUNCIL DISCUSSION/ APPROVAL 29.03.12

# 1. Introduction

## About the consultation

- 1.1 We consulted between 7 December 2011 and 29 February 2012 on the proposed registration cycle for social workers in England.
- 1.2 The Health and Social Care Bill currently before Parliament provides for the transfer of the regulation of social workers in England from the General Social Care Council (GSCC) to the Health Professions Council (HPC) which, under the terms of the Bill, will be renamed the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).<sup>1</sup>
- 1.3 In our consultation we sought the views of stakeholders on setting the registration cycle for social workers in England as part of our preparatory work before opening the Register for the profession.
- 1.4 We emailed around 80 stakeholders including professional bodies, social work employers, and education and training providers, advertised the consultation on our website, and issued a press release.
- 1.5 We would like to thank all those who took the time to respond to the consultation document. You can download the consultation document and a copy of this responses document from our website: [www.hpc-uk.org/aboutus/consultations/closed](http://www.hpc-uk.org/aboutus/consultations/closed).

## About us

- 1.6 We are the Health Professions Council (HPC). We are a regulator and our job is to protect the health and wellbeing of people who use the services of the professionals registered with us.
- 1.7 To protect the public, we set standards that professionals must meet. Our standards cover the professionals' education and training, behaviour, professional skills, and their health. We publish a Register of professionals who meet our standards. Professionals on our Register are called 'registrants'. If registrants do not meet our standards, we can take action against them which may include removing them from the Register so that they can no longer practise.

## About the regulation of social workers in England

- 1.8 Social workers in England are currently regulated by the GSCC. The GSCC maintains the statutory register of social workers in England and also operates a voluntary register of social work students in England. It issues and enforces a code of practice for social workers and approves social work education programmes.
- 1.9 In 2011 the Department of Health published 'Liberating the NHS: Report of the arm's length bodies review'. The report said that the

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<sup>1</sup> The paper refers to the 'HPC' throughout, rather than the 'Health and Care Professions Council' for consistency and clarity.

regulation of social workers in England would move from the GSCC to the HPC.<sup>2</sup>

- 1.10 Subject to Parliamentary approval of the Bill, the GSCC register for social workers in England is expected to transfer to the HPC on 1 August 2012.

### **The purpose of our consultation on the registration cycle**

- 1.11 We consulted on the registration cycle for social workers in England because the registration cycles for each of the professions we regulate are set out in our statutory rules.<sup>3</sup> In order to set the registration cycle for social workers in England, the relevant registration end date for the profession's registration renewal needs to be added to our rules.
- 1.12 Currently social workers registered with the GSCC renew their registration in three yearly cycles, on the anniversary of when they first applied for registration. This means that each social worker on the GSCC register has a date relevant to their own registration by which they need to renew their registration. Unlike the GSCC, each profession registered with the HPC renews its registration in two yearly cycles.
- 1.13 When the HPC Register for social workers in England opens, there will be a one-off transfer of the register for the profession from the GSCC. We will then write to all those who have transferred to welcome them to the HPC and to ask them to renew their registration and pay the relevant registration fee.

### **About this document**

- 1.14 This document summarises the responses we received to the consultation. The results of this consultation will feed into the Department of Health's drafting of a consequential provisions order, which will make consequential legislative changes associated with the transfer of the GSCC register of social workers to the HPC.
- 1.15 The document starts by explaining how we handled and analysed the responses we received, providing some overall statistics from the responses. Section 3 provides a summary of the responses. Section 4 is structured around the responses we received to our proposals, and our responses and decisions as a result are set out in section 5.
- 1.16 In this document, 'you' or 'your' is a reference to respondents to the consultation, 'we', 'us' and 'our' are references to the HPC.

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<sup>2</sup>Review of Arm's Length Bodies – update, Department of Health press release, 18 October 2011, <http://www.dh.gov.uk/health/2011/10/review-of-arms-length-bodies-update/>.

<sup>3</sup>Schedule 5 to the Health Professions Council (Registration and Fees) Rules Order of Council 2003

## 2. Analysing your responses

2.1 Now that the consultation has ended, we have analysed all the responses we received. While we cannot include all of the responses in this document, an overall summary can be found in section 3.

### Method of recording and analysis

2.2 We used the following process in recording and analysing your comments.

- We recorded each response to the consultation, noting the date each response was received and whether it was submitted on behalf of an organisation or by an individual;
- We also recorded whether the person or organisation agreed or disagreed with the proposal (please see the section on quantitative analysis below);
- We read each response and noted the comments received against the proposal, and recorded any general comments;
- Finally, we analysed all the responses.

2.3 When deciding what information to include in this document, we assessed the frequency of the comments made and identified themes. This document summarises the common themes across all responses, and indicates the frequency of arguments and comments made by respondents.

### Quantitative analysis

2.4 We received 48 responses to the consultation document. 39 responses (81%) were made by individuals and 9 (19%) were made on behalf of organisations. The table below provides some indicative statistics for the answers to the consultation proposal.

### Quantitative results

Proposal	Supported the proposal	Did not support the proposal	Unsure/no response
That the registration cycle for social workers in England should end on 30 November in even numbered years	8 (17%)	39 (81%)	1 (2%)

### 3. Summary of responses

- 3.1 The following is a high-level summary of the comments we received in response to the consultation document. Please see section 4 for more detailed thematic analysis.
- 3.2 Most respondents—81 percent—did not agree with our proposal that the registration cycle for social workers in England should end on 30 November in even numbered years. Seventeen percent of respondents supported the proposal.
- 3.3 Comments from respondents who supported the proposed registration cycle for social workers included:
- Being regulated by a regulator that also regulates health professions will increase understanding between health and social care professions.
  - The two-year registration cycle will ensure that the standards for regulation are revisited by social workers more often.
  - Having a shared renewal date for the registration for all social work practitioners will be helpful.
- 3.4 Comments from respondents who did not support the proposal for the registration cycle for social workers included:
- Social workers who need to renew their registration in the twelve months prior to the transfer of the social work register should not be expected to renew their registration until their three year GSCC registration is finished.
  - Many social workers have had pay freezes over the past few years, and will be concerned about the financial implications of changing registration from the GSCC to the HPC.
  - The registration cycle should remain at three yearly intervals, as this is an appropriate timescale and something that has become integrated within individual social work practice.
  - Social work should not be regulated amongst health professions with which it has little in common as it will change the professional identity of social workers.

## 4. Responses – summarised thematically

### Summary

- 4.1 Overall, 39 respondents—81 percent—of respondents did not support our proposal, while eight respondents—17 percent—supported it.
- 4.2 Most of the comments we received in response to our consultation focused on general issues related to the proposed regulation of social workers in England by the HPC and were not about the specific subject matter of this consultation, the setting of a registration renewal cycle date for social workers.
- 4.3 The comments we received—both positive and negative—are summarised below thematically. We have chosen to summarise the responses we received in this way because almost all respondents qualified their responses by commenting on a small but similar range of issues.

### Timing of renewal and registration payments to GSCC and HPC

- 4.4 Seventy-five percent of respondents (36) commented on the transitional arrangements for the register transfer and the timing of registration renewals.
- 4.5 All the comments we received on this issue expressed concern about the effect of the timing of the register transfer on those social workers who are due to renew their GSCC registration this year prior to the proposed transfer of the social work register to the HPC in August. This would mean that the affected social workers will be required to pay to renew their registration twice in the same year, firstly to the GSCC, and then to the HPC once the register for social workers transfers.
- 4.6 Respondents who commented on this issue felt that the requirement for some social workers to pay registration fees twice in the same calendar year was unfair. A number of respondents suggested that transitional arrangements should be put in place to allow the social workers who are affected to have their HPC registration fee reduced or waived. A number of other respondents suggested that that HPC registration renewal should be phased-in over time, or that social workers should only renew their registration with the HPC once their GSCC registration has expired.
- 4.7 Some respondents who are social workers were concerned that their registration would lapse during the transfer period if their GSCC registration was due to expire between August and November 2012 and they did not renew their registration by their own GSCC renewal date during that time.

### Two-year registration cycle

- 4.8 Twenty five respondents—52 percent—commented on the change in the social worker registration cycle from the three years currently

required by the GSCC, to two years when the register transfers to the HPC.

- 4.9 A small number of respondents were positive about the proposed change, and felt that it would ensure that registration requirements were revisited more often, and that it would be reasonable to have the whole profession share the same renewal period. However, there were a number of respondents who while they supported the change, were concerned about the transitional arrangements for social workers who are due to renew their GSCC registration in 2012 prior to the transfer of the register to the HPC. These comments are summarised in paragraphs 4.4-4.7.
- 4.10 Most of the respondents (18) who commented on this issue felt that the proposed change in renewal requirements would be unfair and difficult to understand for social workers who are accustomed to renewing their registration every three years on their own registration anniversary date. Many respondents felt that the registration renewal cycle for the profession should continue as currently set by the GSCC.
- 4.11 Some respondents thought the purpose of the change in registration renewal cycle is to gain more revenue from the social work profession.

#### **Level of fees**

- 4.12 Fifteen respondents—31 percent—were concerned about the change in the level of fees charged to social workers. A number of respondents commented on the increase in the fee from the £30 currently required for GSCC registration annually to £76 by the HPC. Many of the comments we received expressed concern about the fee increase, and whether social workers would be able to afford to pay the registration fee in the current economic climate, where some social workers have been subject to pay freezes.
- 4.13 Some of the respondents to the consultation were employers who were concerned about the increase in costs for them to pay for HPC registration for their social work employees.

#### **Regulation of social workers by the Health Professions Council**

- 4.14 A number of respondents commented on the appropriateness of the HPC undertaking the regulation of social workers. Some respondents felt that change would be positive and would ensure that health and social care professionals would be regulated to the same standards.
- 4.15 Other respondents felt that this change would have a negative impact, as they considered that the other professions currently regulated by the HPC have little in common with the social work profession. One respondent felt that the regulation of social workers by the HPC would 'erode' the professional identity of social workers. One respondent expressed concern about the lack of social-work specific information on the HPC website.

### **Continuing professional development**

- 4.16 Two respondents were concerned about the continuing professional development (CPD) requirements for social workers under the HPC. One respondent expressed concern that the change in registration cycle may mean that social workers would have to undertake more CPD and provide more evidence about it when they renewed their registration which would be an additional burden.

### **Social work students**

- 4.17 Two respondents were concerned about how the change in registration may affect social work students, particularly given the increase in registration fees compared to the GSCC.

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## 5. Our comments and recommendations

- 5.1 The following section sets out our response to the range of comments we have received to the consultation. We recognise that most respondents to our consultation were concerned about more general aspects of the proposed transfer of the GSCC register for social workers to the HPC rather than the specific issue upon which we were consulting. Nonetheless, we have addressed a number of those concerns below. We have not responded to every individual suggestion, but grouped those suggestions thematically and outlined the principles of our response.

### Timing of renewal and registration payments to GSCC and HPC

- 5.2 Many respondents were concerned about the transitional arrangements for the proposed register transfer and the timing of registration renewals.
- 5.3 After the transfer, social workers would be required to pay their £76 annual registration fee to maintain their registration with the HPC for the first year of the proposed 2012-2014 registration cycle. This could mean that a social worker who pays their GSCC registration fee earlier in 2012 will be required to pay a HPC registration fee in November 2012. As the HPC and the GSCC are two separate entities, it is not possible to reduce the fees to take account of payments made to the GSCC.
- 5.4 While we recognise the inconvenience for social workers who will be affected, in the interests of public protection, it is important that social workers continue to maintain their registration with the GSCC and then HPC once the register transfers.

### Two-year registration cycle

- 5.5 Unlike the GSCC, each profession registered with the HPC renews its registration in two yearly cycles. This means that each profession has a fixed point every two years when they renew their registration. It would not be practicable for us to operate a separate registration process for social workers. However we realise that there will be a process of adjustment for social workers who are accustomed to renewing their GSCC registration in three yearly cycles on the anniversary of when they first applied for registration.
- 5.6 By having fixed renewal periods for each profession we can provide a more efficient service in processing renewals for registration than if we renewed registrants on the anniversary date for their initial registration. A fixed point cycle also means that we can target our communications activity for each profession appropriately. In our experience this has helped to ensure that most registrants who wish to continue practising will renew their registration by their profession's renewal date.
- 5.7 A two year period also means that a professional is regularly self-declaring that they continuing to practise, meet our standards, have informed HPC of changes to their health or character and continue to

meet our standards for continuing professional development – see 5.11-5.13. We consider that these are important parts of being a registered professional.

### **Level of fees**

- 5.8 We recognise the concern expressed by respondents about the increase in the registration fee for social workers who will register with the HPC. Unlike the GSCC, the HPC is an independent statutory regulator which receives no subsidy from the government. The HPC's current annual registration fee is £76. While this fee does represent an increase in the amount that social workers in England will have to pay to remain registered, this fee is one of the lowest fees across all of the UK health and social care regulators. The annual fee has remained the same for over three years and the HPC recently announced there would be no increase this year.
- 5.9 Before the announcement of the transfer, the GSCC had begun developing a plan to move towards financial independence, so that it would no longer be reliant on government subsidy. Estimates by the Department of Health indicated that the fee paid by social workers would have needed to increase from £30 to in the region of £200 to achieve that financial independence.

### **Regulation of social workers by the Health Professions Council**

- 5.10 Concerns were expressed by a number of respondents about the appropriateness of the transfer of the regulation of social workers in England to the HPC. We consider that we will be able to regulate social workers in a way that will recognise the distinct nature of the profession as and when it is appropriate to do so. We do not prescribe the model or theoretical approach that people must work to. The professions we currently regulate do not all work to a 'health model' or consider themselves to be 'medical modalities'. We set broad, enabling standards for safe and effective practice and recognise that registrants might meet these in a variety of different ways, depending upon, for example, their professional background or personal preference.

### **Continuing professional development**

- 5.11 Generally the comments we received on the HPC's continuing professional development (CPD) requirements suggest that respondents are not yet familiar with the HPC's CPD requirements.
- 5.12 Until the proposed transfer of the register takes place, the GSCC's current post-registration training and learning requirements (PRTL) will remain in place. Once the social work register transfers to the HPC, social workers will need to meet the HPC's CPD standards. Our CPD standards are outcomes-focused and we have a broad definition of CPD which recognises all the different types of learning social workers engage in, not just formal training or courses. We are interested in the learning benefits of each registrant's CPD rather than the total amount

they do. We do not anticipate that any social workers will need to increase the amount of formal CPD they undertake.

- 5.13 The initial renewal of registration with the HPC will not include an audit of CPD, it will only formalise social worker's registration with the HPC. The first audit of social workers' CPD will take place during the renewal of registration in 2014, when social workers will be asked to self-declare whether they meet our CPD standards, and 2.5 percent of the profession will be chosen at random for audit. We will undertake work to communicate our CPD requirements to social workers prior to their first audit.

### **Social work students**

- 5.14 Some respondents were concerned about how the change in registration may affect social work students. The HPC does not currently register students, although we use statutory powers for approving and monitoring higher education programmes to ensure that only those who meet our ethical and competence standards obtain qualifications that allow them to join the Register.
- 5.15 The Health and Social Care Bill provides for the transfer of the GSCC's student register to the HPC and includes powers which would allow the HPC to set up voluntary registers of students studying programmes which lead to registration. The HPC has undertaken a preliminary impact assessment and has recently consulted on this issue. The results of the consultation will be taken to our Council in May 2012, with a view to making a decision on whether we will register students in the future.

### **Decisions**

- 5.16 After carefully considering the comments we have received including, so far as we can, those that were not specifically about the issue we were consulting on, we consider that it is appropriate that the registration cycle for social workers in England should end on 30 November in even-numbered years. This approach is consistent with the registration process we have put in place for the other professions we regulate, and will allow social workers whose registration transfers from the GSCC on 1 August 2012 sufficient time to renew their registration with the HPC by the end of November.
- 5.17 This would mean the following:
- 31 July 2012 - the register of social workers in England will transfer from the GSCC and responsibility for regulating social workers will transfer to the HPC.
  - August 2012 to 30 November 2012 - social workers in England asked to renew their registration. Social workers must renew their registration by 30 November 2012 or their registration with the HPC will lapse and they will not be able to practise as social workers. The HPC will send each social worker a paper renewal form along

with codes to access our online system. This will allow social workers to renew either on paper or online.

- 1 December 2012 to 30 November 2014 - first registration period for social workers in England.
- The registration cycle for social workers in England will be a two-year cycle ending on 30 November in even numbered years (i.e. the following registration cycle would end on 30 November 2016).

5.18 The results of this consultation will be passed to the Department of Health, to inform the drafting of the necessary amendment to our rules in a consequential provisions order.

5.19 We have noted all the comments and concerns we received in this consultation, and will use this information to inform our communications work with social work employers and registered social workers.

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## **6. List of respondents**

Below is a list of all the organisations that responded to the consultation.

1. Ashley Parkin Consulting Ltd
2. Association of Directors of Adult Services
3. Care Quality Commission
4. City of York Council
5. Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council, Directorate of Adults and Communities
6. Durham County Council, Adults Wellbeing and Health Department
7. North Yorkshire County Council
8. Thought Creative Limited
9. University of Bedfordshire

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