The future of the Approvals Committee

Executive Summary and Recommendations
Introduction

Corporate governance and the work of the Approvals Committee

At a meeting held on 13 June 2006, the Education and Training Committee agreed that it should review the future of the Approvals Committee, as the processes for approving and monitoring programmes have now been established.

The Approvals Committee was established by the Council under article 3(12)(a) of the Health Professions Order 2001 which states:

"The Council - (a) may establish such other committees as it considers appropriate in connection with the discharge of its functions".

The Committee first met on 24 May 2004. It is not a statutory committee (i.e. its establishment is not a requirement of the Health Professions Order 2001). It is a sub-committee of the Education and Training Committee.

The role of the Committee is set out in the Education and Training Committee's Scheme of Delegation as follows:

"Matters delegated to the Approvals Committee

5.1   Approving courses of education and training, qualifications, institutions and tests of competence under Article 15(5) of the 2001 Order;

5.2   Ensuring that universities and other relevant bodies in the United Kingdom are notified of the Standards of Education and Training and the Council's requirements for admission to and participation in such education and training.

5.3   Taking appropriate steps to satisfy the Committee that the standards and requirements referred to in Paragraph 5.1 are being met.

5.4   Approving education and training provided outside of the United Kingdom under Article 15(6) of the 2001 Order.

5.5   Receiving any report submitted to the Committee by a Visitor under Article 16(7) of the 2001 Order.

5.6   Imposing reporting requirements on Visitors under Article 16(7)(b) of the 2001 Order."

The Approvals Committee has met 12 times since it was established. In that time, it has developed procedures and guidance for the approval of programmes.

During 2005 the Committee oversaw the development of a monitoring process to ensure that programmes continue to meet the Standards of Education and Training. The Committee also approved a process for identifying and considering major and minor changes to programmes. Detailed information on these processes was published.

Also in 2005, the Committee agreed further refinements to procedures for approval of programmes. These included a procedure for considering part-time programmes and a procedure for considering requests for deferral of approvals visits. The Committee also approved a questionnaire for use by education providers to give feedback on their experiences of visits.

In November 2005, the Committee agreed to hold monthly Panel meetings to consider Visitors' reports, annual monitoring reports and major and minor changes to programmes. Panel meetings began in January 2006. The work conducted by the Panel has significantly reduced the business which needed to be presented to the Approvals Committee.

New arrangements to replace the Approvals Committee Panels

It is proposed that a Panel of the Education and Training Committee should be established with effect from 1 January 2007 to consider Visitors' reports, annual monitoring reports, major and minor changes to programmes and education providers' representations on Visitors' reports (all these matters were previously considered by the Approvals Panel). It is proposed that the Panel of the Education and Training Committee should hold ten meetings a year, to allow timely consideration of Visitors' reports and other issues as they arise.

It is proposed that meetings should be held in public, so that the decision-making process is as open as possible and that the HPC's stakeholders can observe meetings if they wish. This would not be possible with an alternative method, such as routinely using electronic ratification to approve programmes. Electronic ratification would also not be possible for issues such as education providers' representations on Visitors' reports, where several conditions in a report might be under discussion.

It is proposed that the quorum for the Panel should be three members of the Education and Training Committee, although five members will be invited to each Panel to ensure quoracy, in case a member is unavailable at short notice due to a diary clash or for personal reasons. This has happened on several occasions whilst operating the Approvals Panels. The Panel would elect a Chairman at each meeting.

To minimise the call on the HPC's resources and members' time, Panels will as far as possible be held on the same days as other meetings as, based on experience to date, it is anticipated that they will be relatively short meetings. The proposed dates for Panel meetings are as follows:

Date of Panel meeting	Comment
January 2007	No meeting (low period for Visits)
1 February 2007	
28 March 2007	Same day as Education and Training Committee
April 2007	No meeting
31 May 2007	Same day as Council
12 June 2007	Same day as Education and Training Committee
5 July 2007	Same day as Council
2 August 2007	
27 September 2007	Same day as Education and Training Committee
25 October 2007	
14 November 2007	
4 December 2007	Same day as Education and Training Committee
January 2008	No meeting
4 February 2008	
26 March 2008	Same day as Education and Training Committee
April 2008	No meeting
May 2008	Same day as Council (exact date to be advised)
10 June 2008	Same day as Education and Training Committee

Members of the Approvals Committee

The majority of the members of the Approvals Committee are members of at least one other committee (e.g. Education and Training Committee). Mr Mark Woolcock and Mrs Sue Griffiths are only members of the Approvals Committee. In order ensure that these two members have an opportunity to continue to contribute to the HPC's committees, it is proposed that they should be given priority in being reallocated to other committees. Other members of the Approvals Committee, in common with the other members of the Council, will have an opportunity to apply for vacancies on committees which arise in the future. The allocation of Council members to Committees is a matter for consideration by the Council.

Decision

The Education and Training Committee is invited to recommend to Council that:
1. the Approvals Committee should be disbanded with effect from 31 December 2006;
2. a Panel of the Education and Training Committee should be established with effect from 1 January 2007 and that it should meet 10 times a year and the arrangements should be as outlined above;
3. the Education and Training Committee's Standing Orders should be amended accordingly; and
4. the Council should consider the matter of reallocation of members of the Approvals Committee.

Background information

The HPC's publication "Standards of Education and Training and the Approvals Process - Key Decisions" gave the Approvals Committee a key role in considering draft Visitors'

Reports and considering whether programmes should be approved after conditions in Visitors' Reports had been met. The publication is available from the HPC's website at: http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/1000057Fkey_decisions.pdf

Resource implications

Additional demands on members' time.

Financial implications

Copying and distributing papers, payment of attendance allowance and payment of expenses, catering.

Appendices

None.

Date of paper

25 August 2006.