

Health Professions Council
Education and Training committee 28th March 2007
Graduate unemployment

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Introduction

The issue of workforce planning, and particularly whether there are sufficient junior roles to meet the increased number of students who are graduating, has been of a high profile in certain professions. The attached discussion paper details where the Committee can find more information about this issue, and also outlines some of the regulatory issues that may be raised.

Decision

This paper is for information only. No decision is required.

Background information

None

Resource implications

None

Financial implications

None

Background papers

None

Appendices

None

Date of paper

16th March 2007

Graduate unemployment and HPC registration

A briefing paper for the Education and Training committee

The context

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy has been active in campaigning on the issue of graduates who are unable to find work as junior physiotherapists.

Some of the issues appear to be that:

- The increasing numbers of student places commissioned from universities to meet anticipated increasing demand do not appear to have been met with a corresponding increase in the numbers of positions available.
- Those jobs that are available have tended to be at more senior levels, with fewer junior jobs advertised for just-qualified graduates.
- Some Trusts have been subject to recruitment freezes as a result of the necessity to make financial cut-backs.

Further information can be found on this page of the CSP's website:
www.csp.org.uk/director/newsandevents/campaigns/supportingunemployedgraduates.cfm#survey

Although debates around graduate employment have been most high-profile around physiotherapy, this is thought to be an issue which also extends across other professions, particularly radiography (although less information is available in this area).

Implications for the regulator

HPC's role is separate from workforce planning, and it is therefore not appropriate for the Council as a regulator to become involved in areas such as campaigning on behalf of graduates seeking work. However, the Council will evidently wish to remain abreast of developments in this area, to feed in information from its registration database to others where it may be helpful in making workforce planning decisions, and particularly to review registration processes in the light of workforce planning issues, to anticipate any potential problems, and to provide additional information where appropriate.

The following is a brief overview of systems already established by HPC, which will be particularly relevant to this issue, and which may be the subject of increased interest and questions from graduates seeking work, or from others supporting them. Since HPC does not currently require registrants to provide information about where and how they practise, it should be noted that certain of the issues below are difficult to quantify in terms of the number of registrants who may be affected.

Graduates who cannot find work who do not register

The Health Professions Order allows HPC to make additional requirements of those coming onto the Register for the first time, but only when more than five years has elapsed since they gained their approved qualification.

HPC's advice to those in this position, for example those who find work after a prolonged period of job-hunting, would be that while a formal period of updating is not required, they may wish to undertake updating activities in order to ensure that they have the professional knowledge and skills to practise safely and effectively. Similarly, their employers will wish to ensure they have good induction and support processes for any new graduates they take on where time has elapsed since their qualification (it should also be noted that this issue is not particular to graduate unemployment, but may arise in other circumstances where, for example, a recent graduate takes time off for travel or to pursue a different line of work before coming back to their profession).

Graduates who register but cannot find work

HPC's return to practice requirements mean that if a health professional is registered, and wishes to renew their registration, they must have practised their profession at some point during the two year registration cycle that is coming to an end. Any graduate who is seeking work, but whose qualification was completed less than two years ago, would therefore be able to sign the renewal form and remain registered.

If a graduate was not practising their profession for more than two years, they would need to complete an updating period before renewing their registration. Alternatively, they could come off the Register and complete the updating period before applying for readmission.

It should be noted that the Council has taken a broad definition of 'practising your profession', to take account not only of those registrants who move into positions in education, management or research, but also to take account of the increasingly flexible career pathways that registrants may take, which can see them drawing on their professional skills in areas which take them away from direct clinical practice. The Council has said that the decision as to whether someone is 'practising their profession' must be an individual one, based on whether that person is 'drawing on their professional skills and knowledge in the course of their work'. This provides sufficient flexibility for someone to remain registered even whilst moving away from 'frontline' clinical work, in the interests of maintaining their professional registration for the benefit of public protection.

Graduates working as assistants

Some graduates, in order to keep 'in contact' with their profession, may choose to take on work as assistants while they are seeking professional employment.

Since renewal of registration does not require registrants to meet all of the Standards of Proficiency for their profession, but only those which apply to the area in which they are practising, registrants who are working as assistants, as with any other registrant, may decide upon renewal that they are 'practising', since they are drawing on their professional skills and knowledge in their role. As part of their professional responsibility, they may wish to undertake some updating CPD activity if they were to move from a period in an assistants role, into a professional role, but this is not mandatory since they would not be classed as a 'returner'. It should also be noted that this professional responsibility to undertake appropriate updating before moving into

a new area of work does not only apply to a registrant working as an assistant, but would apply to anyone on the Register who was moving into a different area of work, or specialism.

Recent graduates moving into private practice

There have been comments from some professional bodies that due to a shortage of NHS jobs, and a commitment from graduates to remaining in the profession, some graduates may be moving directly into private practice.

In most cases there is a tradition of best-practice within the profession to do a certain period of time in a role within the NHS before moving into private practice, to allow a period of some degree of supervision, and consolidation of skills.

Professional bodies evidently have an important role to play here, in supporting graduates in this position, and particularly in providing information about what kind of CPD activities they may wish to undertake in order to support them in practice. However, as a regulator, HPC does not require a certain period of time in a managed environment: the standards of proficiency (which all entrants to the Register must meet) are set at a level which is necessary for safe, effective, and therefore professional and autonomous practice. While those entering private practice for the first time may wish to organise some degree of, for example, supervision or mentoring to support them, such activity is not specifically required by HPC, except insofar as it might form part of CPD activity, which is required to be undertaken by all registrants.