Public business

The accreditation of courses in Northern Ireland

Purpose
To explore ways of strengthening the GPhC’s joint accreditation work with the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

Recommendations

The Council is asked to agree:

i. that the GPhC should continue to work jointly with PSNI on accreditation matters to ensure there is a consistent approach to this work across the UK.

ii. that the GPhC should open a dialogue with the PSNI to ensure that future joint work is resourced on a transparent and appropriate basis.

iii. that the GPhC should explore ways it can assist the PSNI by offering staff development opportunities to its accreditors.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The GPhC has GB-wide responsibility for accrediting qualifications leading to registration and annotation as a pharmacist. In Northern Ireland (NI) the responsibility rests with the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland (PSNI), although the GPhC does have the legal power to accredit courses outside GB.

1.2 Courses accredited in NI are:

The Queen’s University Belfast: MPharm degree (full accreditation)
The Queen’s University Belfast: Non-medical prescribing course (full accreditation)
The University of Ulster: MPharm degree (provisional accreditation of a new school)
1.3 It has been the practice of the RPSGB to accredit courses jointly with the PSNI. Both regulators have provided visiting panel members for accreditation visits and the RPSGB (and latterly the GPhC) has provided administrative support and has also drafted a report for both regulators at its own expense.

1.4 PSNI has chosen to adopt GB education standards and related documents rather than developing its own. This means that standards are, in fact, UK-wide rather than GB-wide. This makes a single accreditation exercise logical for courses in NI.

2.0 Key considerations

2.1 Cost: The breakdown of direct costs for an accreditation event other than attendance fees and expenses is:

- Accreditation Manager: £2,100
- Education and Quality Assurance Administrator: £300
- Drafting a report: £2,100
- Postage: £50

Total: £4550 (2010 costs)

Currently, this is borne exclusively by the GPhC. Members are asked to consider whether we should explore seeking a contribution from PSNI.

2.2 Sharing standards: It has been PSNI’s practice to adopt GB education standards and other related documents. This does mean that the RPSGB and GPhC have borne the not inconsiderable cost of developing and consulting on such documents which are then used across the UK. The documents would have to be developed for use in GB whether or not they were adopted in NI, so members are asked to consider whether there should be a formal mechanism for making a request to adopt documents for use in NI and for the adoption to be acknowledged. The GPhC would no doubt consider that there is a public interest from both a GB and UK point of view in consistent approaches to standards. A common approach to standards enables a common approach to accreditation.

2.3 Sharing good practice: The GPhC requires its accreditors to be trained regularly. Members are asked to consider whether its training should be offered to PSNI accreditors, so long as there is no additional cost to the GPhC. Also, members are asked to consider whether PSNI accreditors should be invited to attend or take part in GB accreditations. Again, the caveat should be that there
is no additional cost to the GPhC.

2.4  *Sharing services*: Point 2.1-2.3 relate directly to accreditation activity but it is worth remembering that the GPhC and the PSNI have other activities in common, such as a registration examination. This being the case, the GPhC could explore those areas with the PSNI too.

3.0  **Equality and diversity implications**

3.1 From an equality and diversity perspective, joint working between the GPhC and PSNI has clear benefits. To support and complement PSNI’s four accreditors, the GPhC can draw on the expertise of 40-50 accreditors when assembling its accreditation teams for NI visits: by broadening the spread of expertise in this way the process is strengthened. This is particularly important in NI, where the potential for conflicts of interest in a small and close knit professional community is greater than in GB.

4.0  **Communications implications**

4.1 If the recommendations in this paper are accepted, the next step will be to contact PSNI to discuss Council’s decisions.

5.0  **Resource implications**

5.1 The financial consequences of not sharing accreditation costs with PSNI are that the GPhC will continue to subsidise accreditation (and education standards setting) work in NI. Another way of looking at the issue is to recognise the benefits from a GB perspective of “mutual recognition” between GB and Northern Ireland.

6.0  **Risk implications**

6.1 Were the GPhC to disengage with accreditation in NI it would reduce its influence on the setting and maintenance of education standards across the UK and standards between GB and NI could diverge to no obvious benefit.

**Recommendations**

The Council is asked to agree:

i. that the GPhC should continue to work jointly with PSNI on accreditation
matters to ensure there is a consistent approach to this work across the UK.

ii. that the GPhC should open a dialogue with the PSNI to ensure that future joint work is resourced on a transparent and appropriate basis.

iii. that the GPhC should explore ways it can work more effectively with the PSNI in other areas of common interest in education.

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