Handling Organisational Complaints

Purpose
To report to the Council on the handling of organisational complaints for the period 27 September 2010 to 30 September 2011.

Recommendations
The Council is asked to note:

i. the complaints statistics for the reporting period
ii. the handling of complaints and lessons learnt.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This paper reports on the complaints received about the way in which the organisation carries out its work. It covers complaints made against the workings of the GPhC as an organisation, as opposed to complaints about registrants or appeals against, for example, fitness to practise or registration decisions.

1.2 Complaints are handled by the Governance & Assurance Officer, who works as part of the governance team. The Governance & Assurance Officer commissions and quality assures the responses, keeps the central record of the complaints received and reports on statistical information on the feedback received.

1.3 We have a three-stage approach to handling formal complaints about GPhC
services, as outlined at Appendix 1. In summary, at the first stage complaints are investigated by the Governance & Assurance Officer with the relevant head of service. If the complainant is unhappy with the response and writes to us again, the complaint will be dealt with by the relevant director. The third and final stage is dealt with by the Chief Executive & Registrar.

1.4 In some cases, complaints are addressed and sent directly to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive’s office monitors the responses to ensure that the issues raised are addressed to a satisfactory standard. Complaints that are made directly to a team or member of staff that have not been routed through either the formal complaints procedure or made directly to the Chief Executive’s office are defined as informal complaints. This distinction does not imply that they are any less important. These types of complaints are often made by individuals who in many cases, do not want their feedback formalised as a complaint but instead are seeking an immediate response and remedy to a specific problem. The majority of these are received and handled over the telephone.

1.5 All complaints including how we handled them are logged centrally and kept as part of the central records of complaints. This ensures that we have visibility of all feedback received and allows for us to monitor and address as necessary, as part of the complaints handling process.

2.0 Developing our approach to lessons learnt

2.1 Our approach to complaints handling is not only to be responsive to the feedback we receive but to ensure that problem areas are being addressed to a satisfactory standard.

2.2 The executive is keen that we deal with feedback about our services in a positive manner. Regular monitoring of complaints received by senior management ensures that problem areas are being identified. The executive has introduced a process of regular routine reporting of complaints received and how they have been handled. Positive feedback received is also included as part of this regular reporting. The executive feel that the opportunity should be taken to praise and positively reinforce staff when they are shown to have worked well.

2.3 On a monthly basis, the Governance & Assurance Officer compiles a report of all complaints received for each directorate over the previous month and sends to the relevant director. This includes formal, informal and complaints sent directly to the Chief Executive’s office. A quarterly report is compiled for the executive team to review and discuss together. This report is also shared with
the wider management group where repeat complaints are highlighted and solutions are considered.

2.4 As well as the annual report to Council on complaints handling, the executive decided that the inclusion of complaints statistics in the performance monitoring report, which is presented to Council at each meeting, would provide Council with visibility of complaints received and further assurance that complaints are being handled and reported appropriately.

2.5 Our approach to complaints handling has provided a number of benefits, including increased management information and a keener awareness amongst senior colleagues of specific issues to address. However, the executive is keen to build on and make improvements to this process. Currently under review is to develop a methodology that allows us to feed this intelligence into the business planning improvement process.

3.0 Complaints statistics 27 Sept 2010 until 30 Sept 2011

3.1 Since becoming operational, an overview of the complaints received up until the end of September 2011 is presented below.

### Total number of complaints (broken down by each quarter)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complaints received</th>
<th>27 Sept 2010 - 31 Dec 2010</th>
<th>1 Jan - 31 Mar 2011</th>
<th>1 Apr - 30 Jun 2011</th>
<th>1 Jul - 30 Sep 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal complaints</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complaints made directly to the Chief Executive’s Office</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First complaint</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up complaints</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal complaints</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints received</td>
<td>Statistics recorded from 20 Jan 2011</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Breakdown by themes/categories

Some complaints address more than one issue, these are split by theme/category and each issue is recorded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registration exam</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPhC policy/process</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of communication/information</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delays</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff conduct</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy of recorded information</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome/GPhC decision</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPhC standards</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of information/documentation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to respond</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints handling (i.e. complaints against registrants)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information security</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 The majority of complaints received are informal complaints. Recognising that many complaints are received and handled directly by the customer-facing teams, the executive was keen that these should be captured and logged for reporting and process improvement purposes. The process for logging informal complaints began in mid-January 2011. This approach allows us to follow good practice in complaints handling by dealing with complaints locally where they arise, when this is appropriate, whilst at the same time ensuring that the number and type of issues being dealt with in this way are captured and reported centrally for oversight and organisational learning purposes.

3.3 The second quarter of the year saw an increase in the number of complaints received. This period gave rise to a number of issues; the introduction of mandatory registration for pharmacy technicians which resulted in a lot of feedback about fees and our registration payment methods and processes. The June registration exam also attracted a lot of adverse feedback.

4.0 Complaints handling performance

4.1 All the complaints received in the reporting period were responded to within 15 working days of initial acknowledgement, in accordance with the policy.
5.0 **Repeat complaints and follow up**

5.1 Issues relating to the June registration exam make up the largest single category of complaints received. Council has previously received a full report of the issues and the actions taken to address them.

5.2 Feedback about registration administration makes up the majority of the remaining complaints, with service complaints regarding processing delays and not keeping applicants informed when there is a problem with an application being some of the general service feedback.

5.3 A number of administrative errors were the subject of complaint. These have been analysed in order to identify the causes and take appropriate action, including remedial staff training where required.

5.4 A number of complaints have raised the question of whether fee payments could be made by bank transfer or by telephone. These payment methods are not currently practicable but will be considered as part of the service improvement work as we improve our IT systems.

5.5 The requirement for renewal fees two months in advance of the registration expiry date has been the focus of a number of fees related complaints. Many registrants feel that two months is excessive.

6.0 **Equality and diversity implications**

6.1 Complaints that concern an equality and diversity matter will be addressed as part of the complaints handling process. None of the complaints received in the reporting period have raised equality and diversity issues.

7.0 **Communications implications**

7.1 Our feedback process is publicised on the GPhC’s website. Information about complaints statistics and complaints handling is included in public Council papers which are also published on the website.

8.0 **Resource implications**

8.1 The arrangements for handling, responding to and learning from complaints are within current resources. There are no further resource implications arising from the provision of this report.
9.0 **Risk implications**

9.1 Failure to deal with organisational complaints and/or deal with problem areas could have implications on patient safety and a negative impact on the reputation of the GPhC.

9.2 Where appropriate, complaints are linked to the corporate risk register. This provides visibility of the issue and progress is monitored and reviewed by the Audit & Risk Committee.

**Recommendations**

The Council is asked to note:

i. the complaints statistics for the reporting period

ii. the handling of complaints and lessons learnt.

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*General Pharmaceutical Council*

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3 January 2012
Complaining about GPhC Services
Feedback Procedure

Our customer service complaints policy

We are committed to providing a high quality service to all the people who use our services, but if something goes wrong we need you to tell us about it. This will help us to learn from our mistakes and improve our standards we see complaints, not as a nuisance, but rather as valuable feedback on the quality of our services. Our aim is to resolve complaints quickly, fairly, simply and confidentially, and to learn from them in order to improve our performance and prevent recurrences.

Equally if you have experienced great customer service from our organisation, or you feel someone deserves praise — let us know.

What are customer service complaints?

This procedure is designed to deal with complaints about the way in which the organisation carries out its work. For example, you may feel that a member of staff has been rude to you, or that your query has not been answered quickly enough.

What are not customer service complaints?

This procedure is not designed to deal with:

- Complaints about pharmacists and pharmacy technicians
- Complaints you may have about the outcome of a fitness to practise investigation or registration attempt
- Complaints about council policy. If you have a comment about our policies then the GPhC will be happy to receive this and it will be considered as part of policy development.

How to make a complaint?

If you have a customer service complaint you can contact our complaints manager by letter, e-mail, or by telephone. If you telephone, we will subsequently write a summary of what has been said and ask you to confirm this. When contacting us it would be helpful if you could provide:

- Your name, address, and how you would like us to contact you
- Details about what has led to your complaint
- The name of the person you were dealing with
- What you feel we can do to put things right

If you wish to, you can complete our online complaint form.

You can email your complaint to feedback@pharmacyregulation.org

What happens next?

Once we receive your complaint, we will write to acknowledge your complaint within three working days. We may also ask you to confirm any aspect of your complaint which we are unclear about, and/or provide further details.
Investigating your complaint will usually involve the following steps:

- Once we receive your complaint, we will write to acknowledge your complaint within three working days. We may also ask you to confirm any aspect of your complaint which we are unclear about, and/or provide further details.
- We will acknowledge any further information you provide at this stage within three working days and start to investigate your complaint.
- We will speak to the member(s) of staff involved in the complaint and ask them for their comments on the matters you have raised.
- We will consider their reply and the information you have provided.
- At this stage we may need to ask you for more information. In this case we would either write to or telephone you. Should we telephone we will check that you are happy to talk in this way — you do not have to do so.

After investigating your complaint we will send you a written explanation of what happened, details of how the situation has been or will be addressed, and the likely timescale for this where appropriate. This full response will usually be sent within fifteen working days of acknowledging your full complaint. If we have to change any of our timescales we will let you know and will explain why.

**What happens if, at the end of this process, you are not happy with our response?**

If you are not satisfied with our response to your complaint you should write to or email us again and say so. We will acknowledge your correspondence within three working days of receiving it. The relevant director will review the situation and then write to you giving you their final position on your complaint and their reasons. This will usually be sent to you within ten working days.

If you are still not happy with the investigation of your complaint and our final response you should write to or email us and ask for the correspondence to be reviewed by the council’s chief executive and registrar. You should address this request to the chief executive with the information relating to your complaint. We will send you an acknowledgement within three working days and the chief executive’s response within fifteen working days of the acknowledgement.

If we have to change any of the timescales referred to we will let you know and will explain why.

**What if you are still not satisfied with our response?**

There are no further mechanisms in operation within the GPhC as part of this process and you should seek independent legal advice if you wish to take this matter further. You may wish to contact Community Legal Advice (a free, confidential and impartial advice service paid for by legal aid) on 0845 345 4345 for information on where to find your nearest face-to-face legal advice provider.