



Business Plan

2008 - 2009

To be approved by Council March 2008

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Business Plan 2008/9

Introduction

In 2008/9 the GOC will maintain its focus on its core mission to protect the public by promoting high standards of education and conduct amongst opticians. Our first priority will continue to be to meet our statutory responsibilities in relation to our core functions:

1. Setting standards for optical education and training, performance and conduct
2. Approving qualifications leading to registration.
3. Maintaining a register of individuals who are qualified and fit to practise, train, or carry on business as optometrists and dispensing opticians.
4. Investigating and acting where a registrant's fitness to practise, train, or carry on business is impaired.

Implementing the recommendations of the Government White Paper - "Trust, Assurance and Safety - The Regulation of Health professionals in the 21st Century" published in February 2007.

The legislative framework that will achieve the Governments intentions to restructure health professional regulation will take some three or more years to put into place.

The enabling Bill is expected to be enacted in June/July 2008. This will then be followed by a number of section 60 orders which will enable the Opticians Act and Rules to be reviewed and new working methods introduced. The GOC intends to use these opportunities to reflect, wherever possible, suggestions from registrants and others that will make our systems and procedures more efficient and effective : in particular we are determined to make the registration and renewal process easier and faster.

It is intended that during this transitional phase registrants, education providers etc will see more efficient systems introduced in preparation for the new Council's manner of working. Inevitably there will be a number of consultative documents which we hope will gain considerable interest: for the responses will help to structure the new legislative framework and GOC procedures and systems.

Policy Priorities in 2008/9

Further to the Council's 2007 Performance Review with the CHRE and as part of its policy priorities for 2008/9, it has identified the following key areas of work:

1. Implementing the Rule changes, Handbooks and Accreditation processes to introduce Independent Prescribing of Medicines for specialist optometrist registrants.
2. Preparing to consult on the introduction of a revalidation system for GOC registrants and the possibility of pilot schemes.
3. Agreeing changes to the Opticians Act and Rules so as to be able to implement European Directives, improve the efficient and effective regulation of UK optometrists and dispensing opticians and ensure the safety of the public in the sale and supply of eyewear.

4. Working within a European framework, to ensure that the development of GOC systems for agreeing competencies, recognising qualifications, approving providers of education, introducing registration and revalidation processes etc take into account the agreement of the UK government to European policies and procedures.
5. Reviewing the way in which core competences are presented [across the Standards and Education Committees];
6. Reviewing the GOC's Scheme for Student Registration [across the Standards, Education and Registration Committees];
7. Agreeing the GOC CET Scheme for implementation of any changes from 2010 onwards [across the Education and Registration Committees];
8. Restructuring the GOC organisation to enable the effective and efficient delivery of the GOC's functions in the public interest. To include an appraisal of accommodation, staffing and systems changes required to support the new Council.
9. Improving information management systems further to the redesign and relaunch of the GOC website
10. Developing plans to implement the GOC's Stakeholder Engagement Strategy, to ensure that the Council engages with a wide range of groups, including registrants, service users and partners, and reflects views where appropriate in our policy and decision making.

Implementation of the White Paper

Government Priorities required to be implemented for 2008-09 include:

Governance

1. Liaison with the Department of Health over the legislative change required to establish a smaller, more board-like, Council
2. Liaison with the Appointments Commission over the process of appointing Council Chairman and members to take up their positions as from 1 January 2009
3. Preparing for the new Council proposals for an efficient Committee advisory and executive

Tackling Concerns

1. Oversee the implementation of the plan for introducing the civil standard of proof to be used in fitness to practise hearings from November 2008
2. Liaison with the Department of Health over the legislation and arrangements for the future referral of GOC fitness to practise cases to the Office of the Health Professions Adjudicator
3. The future arrangements regarding the investigation process to include the new function of the CHRE

Revalidation

1. Develop a revalidation scheme for dispensing opticians and optometrists
2. Liaise with interested parties on the setting up of one or more pilot schemes

Registration

1. To contribute to CHRE's work on establishing a common definition of 'good character'
2. To ensure that any changes to the registration Rules reflect the requirements of the Vetting and Barring schemes

Statutory Work of Council

While these policy priorities will receive much focus in 2008/9 the following activities will also form a major part of the work of Council's statutory responsibilities in the year ahead:

Registration

1. To continue to carry out the core registration functions, which include:
 - (a) annual retention process for full registrants (December 2008 - March 2009);
 - (b) restorations to the register post 1 April 2008;
 - (c) student retention process (April - August 2008);
 - (d) new student registration (September/October 2008);
 - (e) registration of applicants transferring to the full register following the successful completion of their pre-registration period and final examinations
2. Timely processing and batching of all registration fees to Finance Department.
3. Processing of registration fees paid by direct debit.
4. Scrutiny of all registration forms for declarations on convictions, health and investigations, and PI insurance for Registrar's determination.
5. Participation in 'student road shows' at all universities and colleges in September 2008
6. The introduction of requisite Rules changes and processes to ensure that membership of Vetting and Barring Schemes are a condition of GOC registration.
7. The registration and monitoring of professionals from the EU working in the UK on a temporary and occasional basis.
8. Registration of EU professionals on the new registers
9. The ongoing day to day management of the CET Scheme.

Education

1. Continuation of the visits programme to universities and colleges for the accreditation of courses.
2. Leading on a review and updating of the CET Scheme for implementation of agreed changes to the Scheme from 2010 onwards.
3. In collaboration with the Standards Committee, review the core competency statements;

4. Review the GOC Handbook on the requirements for the Scheme for the Registration of UK Optometrists.6. Lead on a review of the GOC's Scheme for Student Registration.
5. Committee projects continued from 2007/8 as follows:
 - Project ED01 - Professionals Crossing Borders/Bologna
 - Project ED02 - Entry Standards, Dispensing Opticians [ESDO];
 - Project ED03 - Scheme for Registration (Optometry) (SfR)
 - Project ED05 - Overseas Routes to UK Registration (OQ Sub-Committee).
 - Project ED07 - ECOO Diploma.
 - Project ED08 – Review of the Visit /accreditation process.
 - Project ED09 - Optometry Independent Prescribing Handbook.

Fitness to Practise

1. In house management of the investigation process of allegations made against registrants and referral to the Investigations Committee for consideration.
2. Providing legal advice to the members of the Investigation Committee, to assist in its deliberations on individual cases.
3. Developing the framework within which the Investigation Committee operates, specifically guidance on the circumstances in which cases should be referred.
4. Working alongside the Investigation Committee in setting up a panel of expert witnesses and performance assessors to act in individual cases.
5. Retaining in-house the advocacy at some FTP and other hearings.
6. Management of Council's external legal advisers where decisions to refer to the FTP Panel are reached, and preparation for the hearings process.
7. Management of Registration Appeals and Restorations on behalf of Council.
8. Proactive briefings to registrants of the FTP function.
9. Investigation and referral, in accordance with agreed protocol, on decisions to proceed with criminal prosecutions.
10. Recording and responding to Freedom of Information requests.
11. The implications for the Council's fitness to practise processes of legislative changes.

Standards

1. Develop a revalidation scheme for dispensing opticians and optometrists.
2. Review the competencies of those seeking registration as a dispensing optician or optometrist
3. Establish a regulatory framework for the independent prescribing of medicines by optometrists
4. Review the Sale of Optical Appliances Order 1984
5. Undertake a strategic review of the Codes of Conduct and work with other UK health professional regulatory bodies and those in Europe to introduce harmonisation where ever possible.

6. Keep under review the guidance issued by the professional bodies
7. Commission research on the relationship between the mode of supply of contact lenses and adverse effects

Business Services

1. Management , control, analysis and reporting of all income and expenditure.
2. Management of all office services contracts, including office premises and equipment.
3. Advice on the tendering of all service an support tender processes and contracts.
4. Management of comprehensive risk register, including insurances.
5. Monitoring the Hearings Panel membership to ensure
 - sufficient representation for all FTP hearings
 - provision of training for panel members
6. Contract management of the CET programme with Vantage Technologies Ltd
7. Management of the contract with OCCS for the consumer complaints mediation service.

FTP Hearings

Following the separation of the prosecution and disciplinary functions in 2005, the management of the hearings process and the Fitness to Practise Committee is now established as a separate function of Council.

1. A schedule of hearing dates for 2008/9 which will consist of at least one week per month (excluding August).
2. Budgetary control of FTP Panel members' fees and expenses for attending hearings.
3. Venue arrangements and FTP Panel member availability.
4. FTP Panel member training and appraisals.
5. Management of legal/clinical advisers to the panel, and transcription services.
6. Notification of determinations for publication on Council's website.
7. Preparation for the possible transfer of the hearings process to another body.

Communications

The overall objective for the communications function is to support the Council's mission and objectives through effective internal and external communications.

1. Ongoing work includes:
 - media and parliamentary monitoring
 - proactive and reactive media relations on a range of topics
 - provision of information to a range of stakeholders
 - attendance at relevant optical events and student road shows to promote key messages
 - publication of the Annual Report

- three editions of the GOC newsletter, *Bulletin*, per year.
2. Particular communications support is anticipated for the following areas:
 - Continuing Education and Training
 - Renewal of registration (including students)
 - Roll-out of equality and diversity monitoring
 - White Paper implementation
 - Regulation of sale and supply of optical appliances
 3. Developing plans to implement the GOC's Stakeholder Engagement Strategy.
 4. Further development of the GOC website, including migration of the intranet to the new Content Management System (CMS) and improvements to content and functionality.
 5. Support for the 50th anniversary celebrations, including commemorative publication.

IT Services

1. Evaluation and recommendations for an on-line registration and payment facility for registrants
2. Evaluation of secure remote access to the network for staff use, incorporating a secure firewall protection
3. Evaluation of the capacity of the existing Microsoft Small Business Server and p.c. network capacity
4. Create a configuration database of all IT equipment and renewal/replacement cycle recommendations
5. Update computer usage policy to include handheld devices.

Risk Management

- 1 The GOC takes a pragmatic approach to risk management based on regular assessment of risks that might impact adversely on both the short-term and longer-term strategies.
- 2 The system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives; it can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to:
 - (a) identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the organisation's policies, aims and objectives;
 - (b) evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they occur, and to manage them efficiently and effectively.
- 3 The risk management process involves all of the senior team. The Audit Committee consider the risk analysis on a regular basis. The Finance and Procedure and Audit Committees review operational risk. Risk review systems are highlighted and regular reports made to the appropriate Committee or Council itself. Responsibility for risk management is delegated through the organisation with managers and individual members of staff taking responsibility for managing specific risks.

Financial Information

Income

Total income of £3.558m is estimated in 2008/9.

Of this total, fee income represents £3.334m, or 94% of total income. This estimate reflects the recent trend over the past three years for fee income to increase slightly in each year from more applicants entering the profession. Other income consists of investment income, rental income from Council's upper floor tenant, and sales of the database records to commercial organisations.

Investment income is estimated at £200,000 next year (2007/8 = £185,000) due to the anticipated growth in reserves from the projected carried forward surplus at the end of 2007/8.

Expenditure

a. Staff Costs

Estimated at £1.544m, a 14% increase above the 2007/8 estimated outturn of £1.355m. Council has increased the number of employees from 23 staff at the beginning of 2007/8 to 29 staff for 2008/9. Staff recruitment and staff training budgets are anticipated at £40,000 and £30,000 respectively for 2008/9.

b. Business Resources

A total budget of £999k is estimated, which is +5% above the 2007/8 forecasted outturn. This budget includes office costs, insurances, the expenses of Council meetings and seminars, and the costs of outsourced agreements for the management of the CET Scheme and consumer mediation complaints service.

c. Education

A total budget of £184,000 is anticipated which is a 4% increase on the expected year-end outturn in 2007/8. As well as the costs associated with the Education Committee and the visits programme, in 2008/9 there will be additional costs of preparing consultations to the changes planned to the CET Scheme and Rules and, and the legal costs of implementing these changes.

d. Legal Services

A total budget of £320k is anticipated for 2008/9. The Investigations process will continue to be managed in-house but the external legal costs in preparing FTP cases is estimated at £200k. The other significant element of costs in this area is that of Members fees and expenses for the consideration of allegations made against registrants.

e. Standards

In the coming year, Standards costs are expected to increase significantly to £184k with the legal costs and advice needed for implementing the legislative changes resulting from the White Paper,

Independent Prescribing, Revalidation, the European Directive and the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups legislation.

f. Communications

The budget for communications is expected to remain stable in 2008/9 at £135k. Website development costs will reduce and stakeholder relations costs are expected to increase.

g. Hearings Panel

There remains uncertainty over whether and when the GOC might transfer its Hearings function to a new, separate adjudication body. Until the future of adjudication is settled, the GOC will continue to consider FTP cases through its present arrangements. However, it is thought prudent to include a contingency of £20k in the 2008/9 budget over the 2007/8 costs for the consideration of transferring the existing arrangements to a new body.

h. IT Services

No major replacement projects are anticipated in 2008/9 but some IT equipment will be needed to be replaced as part of the usual upgrade cycle. The budget of £43k represents the costs of maintaining the registrant database, the GOC's server, email and all security/contingency/backup and all current licence arrangements.

i. Legislative Change Costs

During 2007/8, Council has been monitoring the unbudgeted expenditure arising from the legislative changes brought about by the Government White Paper – 'Trust, Assurance and Safety'.

In 2008/9 these costs are expected to increase significantly and while the exact expenditure can only be estimated, an estimate of £100,000 has been included in the budget for 2008/9.

Summary

On the basis of the above assumptions, a year end pre-tax deficit of £181,439 is anticipated which will deplete Council's reserves after tax by £227,439.

Council's reserves totalled £2.37m as at 31 March 2007, following a period when it had added to reserves over a number of years from operating surpluses. At its February 2008 meeting, the Finance and Procedure Committee agreed to recommend to March Council that the anticipated deficit for 2008/9 could adequately be met from current levels of reserves.