

GENERAL OPTICAL COUNCIL
Minutes of the 197th meeting of the Council held on 24 November 2011
at the General Optical Council, 41 Harley Street, London W1G 8DJ

Present: Anna Bradley (in the Chair),
Morag Alexander, Paul Carroll, Peter Douglas, Robert Hogan,
Kevin Lewis, Nicholas Rumney and James Russell (by
teleconference for minutes 7544 - 7549 and 7552 - 7557).

In attendance: Samantha Peters, Jeff Cant, Mandie Lavin,
Kisha Punchihewa, Kiran Gill, Clare March, Matthew Tait,
Simon Grier, Linda Ford, Phil Hallam, Joan Burrow,
Nicola Ebdon and Grahame Tinsley (minutes 7542 - 7543).

Apologies

7536. Apologies were received from Fiona Peel, Selina Ullah, Brian Coulter and Liam Kite.

Declaration of members' interests

7537. There were no additional interests declared.

Minutes of the 196th meeting held on 29 September 2011

7538. The minutes were approved, subject to amendment to minutes 7493, 7517, 7526 and 7529 as agreed at the meeting. Updated minutes would be published as soon as possible.

Matters arising from the 195th and 196th meeting: for information - paper C(41)11

7539. Members **noted** the update on matters arising as circulated. It was **noted** that in future the GOC would ensure references to its three categories of reserves (Legal, Invest to Save and General Revenue) were consistent.

Chair's Report – paper C(42)11

7540. Council **noted** the Chair's report as circulated. Council welcomed the report and **agreed** that it would continue to be produced for each meeting.

CEO Report – paper C(43)11

7541. Council **noted** the CEO's report as circulated. Items of particular interest to Council and discussed further were:
- the use of language for professional titles. It was **agreed** that the terms 'optometrist' and 'dispensing optician' would be used consistently in all GOC publications;
 - the Law Commission Review of Healthcare Professional Regulation. It was **agreed** that the GOC should continue with the approach outlined; and
 - reimbursement of expenses awarded to the GOC by the Court of Session following its decision to dismiss an appeal against the decision of the Fitness to Practice Committee (FTP). It was **noted** that in Scotland a process for reimbursement had been successfully developed.

Performance Report – paper C(44)11

7542. Council **noted** the Performance report for the second quarter of 2011/12 as circulated. Items of particular interest to Council and discussed further were:
- the format of the report. It was **agreed** that the report should identify areas of core activity where an issue needed to be brought the attention of Council or include a statement of assurance that there were no such issues;
 - the use of language. To avoid any confusion with its constitution it was **agreed** that the GOC would describe its communications activity in words which did not include the word promote where possible;
 - Stakeholder Reference Groups had been used frequently remotely and were now being used to help gather feedback on issues such as the level of user friendliness of the GOC website;
 - the customer relationship management system project had been planned well and had resulted in three providers presenting for the contract;
 - press interest in the new Continued Education and Training (CET) scheme had resulted in some confusion amongst registrants. The GOC were working hard to address the issues identified with improved information available on the GOC website;
 - Council would be receiving a report on the CET scheme in March 2012;

- Council's forward planning schedule had been refined to ensure Council's strategic input and Council Seminars had been evaluated to identify improvements; and
- the GOC was continuing to develop its strategic capacity and had made progress in a number of areas.

7543. Council acknowledged that the Strategic Plan had been ambitious and it had now been reviewed to ensure completion could be achieved. Council expressed its gratitude to the GOC executive for the huge amount of progress and hard work of colleagues.

Quarterly Financial Report and Fees 2012/13 – paper C(45)11

7544. Council **noted** the report on fee income received in 2011/12 and considerations for Council in the setting of fees for 2012/13 as circulated. Items of particular interest to Council and discussed further were:
- in 2011/12 Council had agreed a 20% reduction in the fee payable with a forecast for 2012/13 of a fee increase to £274 (assuming an inflation rate of 4%);
 - the GOC had a predicted underspend on its budget of £250,000 due to a number of efficiency measures taken, which included absorbing inflation at 5% and a reduction in income of around £150,000 due to the introduction of the low income fee; and
 - the GOC was committed to delivering the predicted underspend and seek further economies from their Invest to Save programme to maintain a downward pressure on fee income in future years.
7545. Council **agreed** to continue offering the Low Income Earner fee and to review whether the current fee was appropriate in time for the 2013/14 fees review. This review would include results of the 2012 member satisfaction survey and would be brought to Council. It was **noted** that there were indications that the Low Income Earner fee had been successful in reaching the target audience as the level of member lobbying on this issue had significantly reduced. It was **agreed** that the Council would be advised as to the percentage of optometrists and dispensing opticians taking up the Low Income Earner fee.
7546. Council **agreed** to consider a range of options for 2012/13 fees during its private meeting later in the day, but committed to at least holding fees at the 2011/12 level. In reaching this decision Council **noted** that by keeping fees at the 2011/12 level the GOC would need to absorb a variety of costs, including inflation and the CHRE fee.

7547. Council **noted** the Quarterly Financial report as circulated. Items of particular interest to Council and discussed further were:
- the GOC would keep working on its budgeting processes to ensure more accurate budget forecasting;
 - some aspects of budgeting were out of the GOC's control, such as the number of applications for Continued Education and Training events which could always lead to under or over spend against budget; and
 - the budget spend on FTP cases was consistently hard to predict as it depended on the volume and complexity of cases in any one year but that the underspend relating to FTP had not had any negative impact on processes. This success was commended by Council.

Financial Regulations – paper C(46)11

7548. Council **reviewed** the new Financial Regulations as circulated. Items of particular interest to Council and discussed further were:
- the new regulations replaced previous policies and procedures and were based on best practice in the public sector;
 - rules relating to the registers of hospitality and interests applied to Council as well as Committee Members and colleagues;
 - the restriction of investment in bonds to the UK only to reflect the current economic climate would make the GOC's investment policy tighter and more cautious; and
 - the Audit Committee would be reviewing the GOC's banking and investment arrangements early in 2012.
7549. Council **adopted** the new Financial Regulations subject to the following amendments being made by the Executive and reviewed by the Audit Committee:
- the inclusion of a definition of 'emergency payments'; and
 - amend Annex A – The Reserves Policy – to state that the Council would approve the appropriate level of reserves as part of the annual budget process based on advice provided by the Director of Resources.

Audit and Remuneration Committee Membership – paper C(47)11

7550. Council **noted** the content of the paper on appointment of members to the Remuneration and Audit Committees as circulated. It was **noted** that Council had previously indicated that it wished to amend the membership criteria to make appointments on a more flexible basis to best match each Committees functional need with individual Council members' skills and experience. It was **noted** that to-date Council members had not been asked to express interest in becoming members of either committee.
7551. Council **approved** the recommendation that it amend the membership criteria to make appointments on a more flexible basis, on a staged approach as follows:
- each committee assesses its requirements in line with its responsibilities;
 - suitable competency-based membership criteria are developed and brought to Council for approval; and then
 - new appointments are made before April 2012.

Appointments and Re-appointments – paper C(48)11 and C(49)11

7552. Council **noted** the content of the paper on Committee re-appointments as circulated. James Russell advised Council that he had a conflict of interest in relation to this item as his wife was a Member of the Education Committee. It was **agreed** that James Russell would not take part in the discussion or decision regarding re-appointment of Members of the Education Committee.
7553. Council **resolved** to re-appoint the existing members of the GOC's statutory committees for a one year term from 1 January 2012, as per the circulated schedule.
7554. It was **agreed** that in the future prior to re-appointments being made by Council a process of reviewing committee member contribution would be undertaken.
7555. Council **noted** the content of the paper on appointment of a clinical adviser to the FTP team as circulated.
7556. Council **resolved** to appoint Gwyneth Morgan as a clinical adviser to the FTP team.

7557. It was **agreed** that:
- in future re-appointments of clinical advisors would be made by Council following a review of performance;
 - consideration would be given to placing the curriculum vitae's of clinical advisors appointed to the GOC in the public domain; and
 - consideration would be given to identifying the different categories of clinical advisers who may be required by the FTP team.

Devolved Administrations

7558. Council **noted** the following information in relation to Council activity in the devolved administrations:
- the GOC Chair had given the keynote speech at the NES Optometry Conference in Sterling, which had been well received by delegates and had also been attended by the Council member for Scotland;
 - the GOC CEO and the Council member for Scotland had visited the Lothian optometry teach and treat clinic which formed a key part of the NES optometry strategy and had found the visit very useful;
 - the Council member for Scotland was keeping a watching brief on the development of Scottish legislation in relation to the regulation of professions; and
 - an update in relation to activity undertaken in Wales would be circulated to Council for information.

Any other business

7559. There were no items of other business.

Date and time of next meeting

7560. It was **noted** that the next meeting would be at 10.30am on Thursday 26 January 2012 at the General Optical Council, 41 Harley Street, London W1G 8DJ.

Items for Information – papers C(50)11 and C(51)11

7561. Council **noted** the content of the papers on Committees update and stakeholder engagement activity as circulated.