



**Press release
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Regulating health and social care professionals

In a consultation opening today, the Law Commissions of England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are seeking views on how the regulation of health care professionals in the UK and social workers in England can be made clearer, simpler, more modern and more consistent.

In the UK today there are around 1.4 million health professionals working in 31 different professions governed by nine separate regulatory bodies. These include the General Medical, Dental and Optical Councils, the Nursing and Midwifery Council and the Health Professions Council. In England, social workers are currently regulated by the General Social Care Council and they, too, come within the scope of the project.

The job of the regulators is to keep professional registers, set standards for education and practice, and ensure that professionals are fit to practise. In doing so they must act in a way that promotes and protects the health, safety and well-being of the public. But they currently operate within a wide variety of legal frameworks that have evolved in different ways and at a different pace, and were established long before devolution. This has led to a great deal of inconsistency in their powers, duties and responsibilities. In addition, the current system for approving rules is complex and expensive.

In their first ever joint consultation, the Commissions are setting out provisional proposals for the structure of a new legal framework across the UK and seeking views on how a new framework would:

- give the regulators increased flexibility in the use of their powers while ensuring their public accountability
- enable the regulators to ensure proper standards of professional education, conduct and practice, and establish and maintain a register of professionals, and
- have at its heart a duty on the regulators to protect the public.

Frances Patterson QC, the Law Commissioner leading on the project for England and Wales, said: "The existing legal framework for professional regulation is complex and expensive, and it requires continuous Government intervention to keep it up to date. This joint consultation will inform our joint project to establish a regulatory system for the four countries of the UK that is clear, consistent and modern. It must be robust enough to ensure proper standards for safe and effective practice yet flexible enough to cope with emerging and future policy developments."

Patrick Layden QC TD, leading the project for the Scottish Law Commission, said: "Policy makers throughout the UK are encouraging people to take more responsibility for their health. We should try to build a system of health regulation that is easier for citizens, as well as health and social care professionals, to understand and that is committed to protect the health, safety and well-being of the public."

[more]

Leading the project for the Northern Ireland Law Commission, The Hon Mr Justice McCloskey said: “The regulatory system governing the health and social care professions of the UK has its roots in a time that long pre-dates devolution. One of the aims of this project is to ensure that, as we reform the regulatory system and bring it up to date, the legitimate interests of the devolved administrations are properly recognised and expressed.”

The Commissions seek responses by 31 May 2012. The consultation paper, “Regulation of Health Care Professionals and Regulation of Social Care Professionals in England”, includes a full list of provisional proposals, and can be found on the Law Commissions’ websites at: www.lawcom.gov.uk, www.scotlawcom.gov.uk and www.nilawcommission.gov.uk

Notes for editors

1. The 32 registered health and social care professions and their relevant regulators.

Regulatory bodies	Registered professions
General Chiropractic Council (GCC)	Chiropractors
General Dental Council (GDC)	Dentists, clinical dental technicians, dental hygienists, dental nurses, dental technicians, dental therapists and orthodontic therapists
General Medical Council (GMC)	Doctors
General Optical Council (GOC)	Optometrists and dispensing opticians
General Osteopathic Council (GOsC)	Osteopaths
General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC)	Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians in Great Britain
General Social Care Council (GSCC)	Social workers in England
Health Professions Council (HPC)	Arts therapists, biomedical scientists, chiropodists/podiatrists, clinical scientists, dieticians, hearing aid dispensers, occupational therapists, operating department practitioners, orthoptists, paramedics, physiotherapists, practitioner psychologists, prosthetists/orthotists, radiographers and speech and language therapists
Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC)	Nurses and midwives
Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland (PSNI)	Pharmacists in Northern Ireland

2. More details on this project can be found at:
 - <http://www.lawcom.gov.uk> (see the Regulation of Health Care Professionals project page)
 - <http://www.scotlawcom.gov.uk/law-reform-projects/joint-projects/regulation-of-health-care-professions/>
 - <http://www.nilawcommission.gov.uk/>

3. The Law Commission and the Scottish Law Commission are non-political independent bodies set up by Parliament in 1965 to keep all the law of England and Wales and of Scotland under review, and to recommend reform where it is needed.
4. The Northern Ireland Law Commission exists to review areas of the law and to make recommendations for reform. It was established under the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 (as amended by the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Devolution of Policing and Justice Functions) Order 2010), and was set up in 2007 following the recommendations of the Criminal Justice Review Group.
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