
Consultation on changes to the profession-specific standards of proficiency for hearing aid dispensers

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document seeks the views of stakeholders on proposed changes to the profession-specific standards of proficiency for hearing aid dispensers.
- 1.2 We are conducting our review of the profession-specific standards on a rolling basis by reviewing the standards of proficiency for groups of professions at a time. More information about the review process is set out below.
- 1.3 The consultation will be of interest to members of the profession, as well as relevant education providers, employers, professional bodies, and those who use the services of this profession.
- 1.4 The consultation will run from **Monday, 13 January 2014 to Friday, 4 April 2014**.

2. About the Health and Care Professions Council

- 2.1 We are a regulator and were set up to protect the public. To do this, we keep a register of professionals who meet our standards for their professional skills and behaviour. Individuals on our Register are called 'registrants'.
- 2.2 We currently regulate 16 professions: arts therapists, biomedical scientists, chiropodists/podiatrists, clinical scientists, dietitians, hearing aid dispensers, occupational therapists, operating department practitioners, orthoptists, paramedics, physiotherapists, practitioner psychologists, prosthetists/orthotists, radiographers, social workers in England, and speech and language therapists.

3. About the standards of proficiency

- 3.1 The standards of proficiency are the standards that we consider necessary for the safe and effective practice of each of the professions we regulate. They describe what professionals must know, understand, and be able to do at the time they apply to join our Register. The standards play an important role in public protection. When a professional applies for or renews their registration, or if concerns are raised about their competence while they are registered with us, we use the standards of proficiency to check whether they have the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to practise their profession safely and effectively.
- 3.2 Article 5(2)(a) of the Health and Social Work Professions Order 2001 (the Order) says that we must: "...establish the standards of proficiency necessary to be admitted to the different parts of the Register being the standards [the Council] considers necessary for safe and effective practice under that part of the Register".
- 3.3 This means that we must publish standards for each of the professions which are the 'necessary' or 'minimum' that we consider to be required for safe and effective practice.

- 3.4 There are separate standards of proficiency for each of the professions we regulate. The standards of proficiency complement our other standards as well as policies developed by employers and guidance produced by professional bodies.

Structure of the standards

- 3.5 The standards of proficiency are divided into generic standards (which apply to all the professions) and standards specific to each of the professions regulated. The purpose of the generic standards is to recognise commonality across all the professions that we regulate. The purpose of the profession-specific standards is to set out additional standards for each profession relevant to the generic standard.
- 3.6 We consulted on changes to the generic standards of proficiency between July and October 2010.¹ The new generic standards have now been agreed by our Council and are not the subject of this consultation. Under the new structure, most of the standards of proficiency will be profession-specific, listed under the 15 new generic standards.

Order of the standards

- 3.7 The standards of proficiency are not hierarchical and are all equally important in practice. When we were considering an appropriate order for the generic standards, we felt that there are certain standards—such as the requirement to ‘practise safely and effectively within their scope of practice’—that set the highest-level requirements for all registrants, and should logically be placed at the beginning of the list. In considering the order of the profession-specific standards of proficiency, we have continued this approach by listing standards that are about more general principles first under the relevant generic standards, followed by standards that address more specific competencies.

Language used in the standards

- 3.8 As mentioned above, the standards of proficiency are the minimum standards for safe and effective practice. This means that they have to be relevant and applicable to prospective registrants applying to come on to the Register for the first time, as well as existing registrants and their practice.
- 3.9 The language used in the standards plays an important role in ensuring that they meet the above requirements. We intentionally use verbs such as ‘understand’, ‘know’ and ‘be able to’ rather than ‘must’.
- 3.10 For example: *be able to practise within the legal and ethical boundaries of their profession*. By using ‘be able to’ we can ensure that:

¹ You can find more information about the consultation on our website here: www.hcpc-uk.org/aboutus/consultations/closed/index.asp?id=110

- the standard is applicable to prospective registrants - i.e. those who have not yet started practising and are applying to be registered for the first time; and
 - the standard is relevant and applicable to existing registrants. It could also be used in a fitness to practise case where a registrant's conduct or competence was called in to question.
- 3.11 If we changed the wording of this standard, for example, to 'registrants must practise within the legal and ethical boundaries of their profession' it could no longer be met by prospective registrants who have not yet practised in their profession.
- 3.12 We write the standards in a way that means they are relevant to all registrants in a profession, regardless of their area of practice. We also use language that can take into account changes in the law, technology or working practices which might take place over time.
- 3.13 We have received some feedback to suggest that the language and terminology used in the profession-specific standards for some professions needs to be amended to better reflect the practice of those professions. We hope that the new draft standards will address these concerns.

4. How we use the standards of proficiency

Approval of education programmes

- 4.1 The primary role of the standards of proficiency is in articulating the skills, knowledge and abilities necessary to become registered for the first time.
- 4.2 We conduct approval visits to education providers to ensure that the programmes meet the standards. Our standards of education and training cover areas such as admissions, assessment and practice placements, and we approve programmes using these standards. A programme which meets the standards of education and training will also allow a student who successfully completes that programme to meet the standards of proficiency.

Registration and renewal

- 4.3 The standards of proficiency play a central role in how someone becomes and remains registered with us.
- 4.4 Most applicants complete their study within the UK and apply for registration through our UK approved programme route. We assess all approved programmes to ensure that students who successfully complete them meet the standards of proficiency and are therefore eligible for registration.
- 4.5 International applications are also assessed against the standards of proficiency. Each application is assessed by assessors from the relevant profession to determine whether the applicant's education, training and experience mean that they meet the standards.

- 4.6 Every time a registrant renews their registration, we ask them to sign a declaration to confirm that they continue to meet the standards of proficiency which apply to them.

Fitness to practise

- 4.7 If a registrant's competence is called into question we may look at the standards of proficiency in deciding whether we need to take any action. This does not mean that we will take action if a registrant does not meet all of the standards, but we may use the standards to decide whether they are practising safely and effectively within their scope of practice.

Scope of practice

- 4.8 As outlined above, when registrants renew their registration they must sign a declaration to state that they meet the standards which apply to them.
- 4.9 Once someone becomes registered, we recognise that their scope of practice may change. We define scope of practice as the area or areas of a registrant's profession in which they have the knowledge, skills and experience to practise lawfully, safely and effectively, in a way that meets our standards and does not pose any danger to the public or to them.
- 4.10 A registrant's scope of practice may change over time and we recognise that the practice of experienced registrants often becomes more focussed and specialised than that of newly registered colleagues. This might be because of specialisation in a particular area of practice or with a particular group, or a movement into roles in management, education or research.
- 4.11 A registrant's particular scope of practice may mean that they are unable to continue to demonstrate that they meet all of the standards of proficiency that apply for the whole of their profession. As long as they make sure that they are practising safely and effectively within their given scope of practice and do not practise in the areas where they are not proficient to do so, this will not be a problem.

5. Reviewing the profession-specific standards of proficiency

The review process

- 5.1 We have invited the professional body for the hearing aid dispenser profession, the British Society of Hearing Aid Audiologists, to review the standards of proficiency for their profession and tell us whether they considered any changes were necessary. We have carefully considered their comments and other feedback we have received on the standards and produced a proposed set of draft standards for their profession.

- 5.2 We are now publicly consulting on the draft standards to seek the views of all our stakeholders. After consultation, we use the responses we receive to decide if any further amendments are needed.
- 5.3 Once the final set of standards is approved, they will be published. We will work with education providers to gradually phase-in the new standards after they are published.

Updating the profession-specific standards

- 5.4 In the new structure of the standards of proficiency, most of the standards will be profession-specific. To set out the new draft standards for each profession in the new structure, we mapped all the current standards of proficiency for each profession under the relevant new generic standards. This consultation is not about changes to the approved generic standards, only the profession-specific standards for hearing aid dispensers.
- 5.5 The changes to the standards proposed in each set of draft standards are to:
- reflect current practice or changes in the scope of practice of each profession;
 - update the language where needed to ensure it is relevant to the practice of each profession and to reflect changes in current use of terminology;
 - reflect the standard content of pre-registration education programmes;
 - clarify the intention of existing standards; and
 - correct omissions or to avoid duplication.
- 5.6 The review of the profession-specific standards is an opportunity to make sure the standards of proficiency are relevant to each profession. No relevant or useful standards will be lost, but the language used may change to ensure the standards are appropriate and applicable to individual professions. Where it is appropriate to do so, we also aim to maintain as much consistency as possible in the standards between different professions. Our current standards of proficiency are available to download for comparison from this page of our website:
www.hcpc-uk.org/aboutregistration/standards/standardssofproficiency/
- 5.7 We are inviting our stakeholders to consider whether the changes we have suggested to the profession-specific standards of proficiency for each profession are appropriate. In addition to the changes we have suggested there may be other areas we have not considered that need to be reflected in the standards.

6. Your response

Consultation questions

- 6.1 We would welcome your response to our consultation and have listed some questions to help you. The questions are not designed to be exhaustive and we would welcome your comments on any related issue. Please provide reasons alongside your answers where possible.
- 6.2 The questions are listed below for your reference:
1. Do you think the standards are at a threshold level necessary for safe and effective practice?
 2. Do you think any additional standards are necessary?
 3. Do you think there are any standards which should be reworded?
 4. Do you have any comments about the language used in the standards?
 5. Do you have any other comments on the standards?

How to respond to the consultation

- 6.3 You can respond to this consultation in the following ways.

- By completing our easy-to-use online survey:
<https://www.research.net/s/proficiencystandardsforhearingaiddispensers>
- By emailing us at: consultation@hcpc-uk.org
- By writing to us at the following address:

Consultation on changes to the profession-specific standards of proficiency for hearing aid dispensers
Policy and Standards Department
Health and Care Professions Council
Park House
184 Kennington Park Road
London
SE11 4BU

- 6.4 We do not normally accept responses by telephone or in person. We normally ask that consultation responses are made in writing to ensure that we can accurately record what the respondent would like to say. However, if you are unable to respond in writing please contact us on +44 (0)20 7840 9815 to discuss any reasonable adjustments which would help you to respond.
- 6.5 Please complete the online survey or send us your response by **4 April 2014**. We look forward to receiving your comments.

Please contact us to request a copy of this document in an alternative format, or in Welsh.

- 6.6 Once the consultation period is completed, we will analyse the responses we have received. We will then publish a document which details the comments received and explains the decisions we have taken as a result. This will be available on our website.
- 6.7 If you would prefer your response not to be made public, please indicate this when you respond

Appendix: Draft standards of proficiency for hearing aid dispensers

Notes for interpretation

The generic standards of proficiency are not the subject of this consultation.

The current standards of proficiency for hearing aid dispensers are available to download and view for comparison at:
www.hpc-uk.org/aboutregistration/standards/standardssofproficiency/

| New generic standard | Suggested profession specific standards |
|--|--|
| 1. be able to practise safely and effectively within their scope of practice | 1.1 know the limits of their practice and when to seek advice or refer to another professional |
| | 1.2 recognise the need to manage their own workload and resources effectively and be able to practise accordingly |
| 2. be able to practise within the legal and ethical boundaries of their profession | 2.1 understand the need to act in the best interests of service users at all times |
| | 2.2 understand what is required of them by the Health and Care Professions Council |
| | 2.3 understand the need to respect and uphold the rights, dignity, values and autonomy of service users including their role in the diagnostic and therapeutic process and in maintaining health and wellbeing |
| | 2.4 recognise that relationships with service users should be based on mutual respect and trust, and be able to maintain high standards of care even in situations of personal incompatibility |
| | 2.5 be aware of current legislation applicable to the work of their profession |
| | 2.6 understand the importance of and be able to obtain informed consent |
| | 2.7 be able to exercise a professional duty of care |
| 3. be able to maintain fitness to practise | 3.1 understand the need to maintain high standards of personal and professional conduct |
| | 3.2 understand the importance of maintaining their own health |
| | 3.3 understand both the need to keep skills and knowledge up to date and the importance of career-long learning |

| New generic standard | Suggested profession specific standards |
|---|---|
| 4. be able to practise as an autonomous professional, exercising their own professional judgement | 4.1 be able to assess a professional situation, determine the nature and severity of the problem and call upon the required knowledge and experience to deal with the problem |
| | 4.2 be able to make reasoned decisions to initiate, continue, modify or cease treatment or the use of techniques or procedures, and record the decisions and reasoning appropriately |
| | 4.3 be able to initiate resolution of problems and be able to exercise personal initiative |
| | 4.4 recognise that they are personally responsible for and must be able to justify their decisions |
| | 4.5 be able to make and receive appropriate referrals |
| | 4.6 understand the importance of participation in training, supervision and mentoring |
| 5. be aware of the impact of culture, equality, and diversity on practice | 5.1 understand the requirement to adapt practice to meet the needs of different groups and individuals |
| 6. be able to practise in a non-discriminatory manner | |
| 7. understand the importance of and be able to maintain confidentiality | 7.1 be aware of the limits of the concept of confidentiality |
| | 7.2 understand the principles of information governance and be aware of the safe and effective use of health and social care information |
| | 7.3 be able to recognise and respond appropriately to situations where it is necessary to share information to safeguard service users or the wider public |
| 8. be able to communicate effectively | 8.1 be able to demonstrate effective and appropriate verbal and non-verbal skills in communicating information, advice, instruction and professional opinion to service users, carers, colleagues, and others |
| | 8.2 be able to communicate in English to the standard equivalent to level 7 of the International English Language Testing System, with no element below 6.5 ² |

² The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) tests competence in the English language. Applicants who have qualified outside of the UK, whose first language is not English and who are not nationals of a country within the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland, must provide evidence that they have reached the necessary standard. Please visit our website for more information.

| New generic standard | Suggested profession specific standards | |
|---|--|---|
| | 8.3 understand how communication skills affect assessment of and engagement with service users and how the means of communication should be modified to address and take account of factors such as age, capacity, learning ability and physical ability | |
| | 8.4 be able to select, move between and use appropriate forms of verbal and non-verbal communication with service users and others | |
| | 8.5 be aware of the characteristics and consequences of verbal and non-verbal communication and how this can be affected by factors such as age, culture, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status and spiritual or religious beliefs | |
| | 8.6 understand the need to provide service users or people acting on their behalf with the information necessary to enable them to make informed decisions | |
| | 8.7 understand the need to assist the communication needs of service users such as through the use of an appropriate interpreter wherever possible | |
| | 8.8 be able to explain the financial implications of suitable hearing aid systems | |
| | 8.9 understand the specific communication needs of those with impaired hearing and be aware of appropriate steps to overcome communication barriers | |
| | 8.10 recognise the need to seek external assistance in situations where communication is ineffective for whatever reason | |
| | 8.11 recognise the need to use interpersonal skills to encourage the active participation of service users | |
| | 8.12 recognise the need to use appropriate interpersonal and communication skills to facilitate effective care for those with impaired hearing | |
| | 8.13 understand the need to empower service users to manage their aural health and related issues including self-treatment where appropriate | |
| | 9. be able to work appropriately with others | 9.1 be able to work, where appropriate, in partnership with service users, other professionals, support staff, and others |
| | | 9.2 be able to recognise those conditions or circumstances that require the involvement of other professionals and give the appropriate advice to service users |
| 9.3 understand the need to build and sustain professional relationships as both an independent practitioner and collaboratively as a member of a team | | |

| New generic standard | Suggested profession specific standards |
|--|--|
| | 9.4 understand the need to engage service users and carers in planning and evaluating diagnostics, treatments and interventions to meet their needs and goals |
| | 9.5 be able to contribute effectively to work undertaken as part of an inter-disciplinary team |
| 10. be able to maintain records appropriately | 10.1 be able to keep accurate, comprehensive and comprehensible records in accordance with applicable legislation, protocols, and guidelines |
| | 10.2 recognise the need to manage records and all other information in accordance with applicable legislation, protocols and guidelines |
| 11. be able to reflect on and review practice | 11.1 understand the value of reflection on practice and the need to record the outcome of such reflection |
| | 11.2 recognise the value of case conferences and other methods of review |
| | 11.3 be aware of emerging technologies and new developments in hearing care practices |
| 12. be able to assure the quality of their practice | 12.1 be able to engage in evidence-based practice, evaluate practice systematically and participate in audit procedures |
| | 12.2 be able to gather information, including qualitative and quantitative data, that helps to evaluate the responses of service users to their care |
| | 12.3 be aware of the role of audit and review in quality management, including quality control, quality assurance, and the use of appropriate outcome measures |
| | 12.4 be able to maintain an effective audit trail and work towards continual improvement |
| | 12.5 be aware of, and be able to participate in, quality assurance programmes, where appropriate |
| | 12.6 be able to evaluate intervention plans using recognised outcome measures and revise the plans as necessary in conjunction with the service user |
| | 12.7 recognise the need to monitor and evaluate the quality of practice and the value of contributing to the generation of data for quality assurance and improvement programmes |
| 13. understand the key concepts of the knowledge base relevant to their profession | 13.1 understand the structure and function of the human body, together with knowledge of health, disease, disorder and dysfunction relevant to their profession |
| | 13.2 be aware of the principles and applications of scientific enquiry, including the evaluation of treatment efficacy and the research process |
| | 13.3 recognise the role of other professions in health and social care |

| New generic standard | Suggested profession specific standards |
|--|--|
| | 13.4 understand the structure and function of health and social care services in the UK |
| | 13.5 understand the concept of leadership and its application to practice |
| | 13.6 understand the theoretical basis of, and the variety of approaches to, assessment and intervention |
| | 13.7 understand, in the context of hearing aid audiology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the anatomy and physiology of the outer, middle, inner ear and central auditory pathways; - psycho-acoustics; - acoustics, speech production and perception; - the measurement of hearing and of other auditory system functions; - hearing aid and associated technologies including selection, fitting, programming and evaluation; and - appropriate approaches to auditory rehabilitation |
| 14. be able to draw on appropriate knowledge and skills to inform practice | 14.1 be able to change their practice as needed to take account of new developments or changing contexts |
| | 14.2 be able to conduct appropriate diagnostic or monitoring procedures, treatment, therapy, or other actions safely and effectively |
| | 14.3 be able to safely use appropriate techniques and equipment to assess hearing loss and the physical condition of the ear |
| | 14.4 be able to select and evaluate the most appropriate hearing aid system and performance settings and/or associated technologies for service users |
| | 14.5 be able to plan, implement and manage appropriate rehabilitation programmes for service users to optimise outcomes |
| | 14.6 be able to safely and competently take impressions of the ear |
| | 14.7 be able to safely and competently programme and physically fit hearing aids |
| | 14.8 understand the need to provide service users with access to continuing care, maintenance and support |
| | 14.9 be able to formulate specific and appropriate management plans including the setting of timescales |

| New generic standard | Suggested profession specific standards |
|--|--|
| | <p>14.10 be able to formulate and provide appropriate advice regarding hearing aids and associated technologies and their use to facilitate informed choices by service users</p> <p>14.11 be able to gather appropriate information</p> <p>14.12 be able to undertake and record appropriate case histories</p> <p>14.13 understand the need to make and keep full and accurate records of assessment results, hearing aid prescriptions and actual settings, rehabilitation plans and outcomes</p> <p>14.14 be able to select and use appropriate assessment techniques</p> <p>14.15 be able to undertake and record a thorough, sensitive and detailed assessment, using appropriate techniques and equipment</p> <p>14.16 be able to check that equipment is functioning accurately and within specifications and to take appropriate action in the case of faulty functioning and operation</p> <p>14.17 be able to undertake or arrange investigations as appropriate</p> <p>14.18 be able to analyse and critically evaluate the information collected</p> <p>14.19 be able to interpret the data arising from case history, physical examination, and hearing assessments</p> <p>14.20 be able to demonstrate a logical and systematic approach to problem solving</p> <p>14.21 be able to use research, reasoning and problem solving skills to determine appropriate actions</p> <p>14.22 recognise the value of research to the critical evaluation of practice</p> <p>14.23 be aware of a range of research methodologies</p> <p>14.24 be able to evaluate research and other evidence to inform their own practice</p> <p>14.25 be able to use information and communication technologies appropriate to their practice</p> |
| <p>15. understand the need to establish and maintain a safe practice environment</p> | <p>15.1 understand the need to maintain the safety of both service users and those involved in their care</p> <p>15.2 ensure that the environment in which service users are seen is appropriate for the assessment, service, care and attention given</p> <p>15.3 be aware of applicable health and safety legislation, and any relevant safety policies and procedures in force at the workplace, such as incident reporting, and be able to act in accordance with these</p> |

| New generic standard | Suggested profession specific standards |
|-----------------------------|---|
| | 15.4 be able to work safely, including being able to select appropriate hazard control and risk management, reduction or elimination techniques in a safe manner and in accordance with health and safety legislation |
| | 15.5 be able to establish safe environments for practice, which minimise risks to service users, those treating them and others, including the use of hazard control and particularly infection control |