

Russell George MS
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
Senedd
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

By email to: Russell.George@senedd.wales

24 September 2024

Dear Mr. George

Regulatory performance at the General Pharmaceutical Council

We are writing in relation to the Professional Standards Authority's (PSA) letter to you dated 19 September 2024 updating you on their latest review of our regulatory performance. The PSA has found that we meet 17 of the 18 standards of good regulation. We wanted to update you on the work we are doing to improve the timeliness of our fitness to practise cases, which the PSA has written to you about. We are committed to consistently meeting all the standards of good regulation.

Our commitment

Ensuring a fair, proportionate, and timely resolution of fitness to practise concerns remains the highest priority for everyone at the GPhC. It is a key element of our strategic commitment to deliver effective consistent and fair regulation and is necessary to ensure that we fulfil our public protection remit as well as building and retaining public confidence in our profession. We are pleased that the PSA have noted that, in spite of the challenges faced, we have demonstrated our ability to manage and mitigate potential risk through our interim order process as well as retaining all other standards, including those in relation to accessibility and the fairness and quality of our decision making.

Our progress

Over the last year we have taken further steps to enhance and reinforce our operational strategy to ensure that the GPhC can work most efficiently and effectively. We have created a new Chief Enforcement Officer role to oversee the end-to-end fitness to practise function and have undertaken a review and refresh of our 2021 improvement programme, focussing on more targeted actions to address the legacy backlog we absorbed during the pandemic.

Some of the targeted work we have undertaken includes:

- ✓ restructuring our teams to build more resilience and responsiveness to dips in our resource and capacity and have implemented revised metrics across each stage of our process to enable more oversight and management of our performance on a more frequent basis.

- ✓ embedded legal, clinical and inspectorate expertise into our casework teams to support a more proportionate and targeted focus for the investigation;
- ✓ conducted a deep dive of all investigations that had been placed on hold to ensure active progression or closure where possible and appropriate,
- ✓ a review of all linked concerns to ensure we investigate the totality of the concern rather than focussing on individual incidents,
- ✓ trained our panel secretaries to draft hearing determinations, releasing the capacity from our chairs to focus on hearings management and improved hearing utilisation,
- ✓ implemented a proactive quality assurance review of open investigations to monitor and ensure compliance with deadlines,
- ✓ reviewed all events that have not concluded within their allocated time to develop more robust framework for scheduling hearings,
- ✓ developed a new case management meeting process to proactively engage with hearing parties in advance of the event to resolve any case management issues in advance of the hearing.

We recognise that there is some way to go but indications remain positive. In spite of a year on year 30 per cent increase in concerns being brought to the Council – up from just over 3000 in 2022 to almost 5,500 in this reporting year and projected to rise further, we have successfully reduced our open investigation backlog by over 20 per cent. We recognise that as our overall numbers are relatively small in comparison to some of our regulatory partners – with on average fewer than 100 of the 5,500 concerns received being concluded at a final investigation committee or fitness to practise committee – each aged resolution will disproportionately impact on our reported median timescale at the time of closure. We remain committed to progressing our legacy caseload to resolution within the next 12 months.

Our monitoring and assurance

Our Council and our Audit and Risk Committee continue to scrutinise performance against our objectives regularly and our internal Standards Board, chaired by our chief executive, continues to provide the cross organisational challenge and support to our progress towards meeting, sustaining and ultimately exceeding the reasonable expectations set of us. We will provide further assurance during the coming months.

We have written in similar terms to Jeremy Miles MS as Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care and to counterparts in the Westminster and Scottish parliaments.

Yours sincerely



Gisela Abbam
Chair



Duncan Rudkin
Chief Executive & Registrar

cc. Caroline Corby, Chair, Professional Standards Authority