

This new Annual Review summarises what the HAC has achieved over the past 12 months and outlines what we hope to achieve in the coming year.

The HAC - Who We Are

The Hearing Aid Council (HAC) is a Statutory Body established under the Hearing Aid Council Act 1968 (which was amended in 1989). It regulates anyone who sells hearing aids whether in the High Street, the purchaser's home or in a hospital. The Act makes it a statutory requirement that hearing aids may only be sold by a dispenser who is suitably qualified and who is registered with the HAC.

All registered hearing aid dispensers (RHADs) and their employers must comply with the Code of Practice. If they fail to do so, they may face a disciplinary process with a range of penalties including fines, suspension and erasure from the register.

The Hearing Aid Council's key achievements in 2003/4

- 88 new dispensers registered with the HAC in 2003/4 - a 6.5% increase in the last twelve months. There were 1258 dispensers and 184 employers registered with the HAC at 31 March 2004.
- 118 people passed their HAC exams in 2003 - a pass rate of 61.4% (69.3% in 2002). 7 people taking the exam achieved a distinction.
- In November 2003 the HAC introduced its Continuous Professional Development scheme on a voluntary basis. Since then 32 courses have been successfully registered. CPD will become compulsory for all RHADs on 1 April 2005.
- In February 2004, the HAC's revised Code of Practice was approved by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. This introduced a number of important changes to the standards we expect RHADs to meet. The Code will come into force on 1 September 2004.
- 24,614 hits have been made on our website since its creation in September 2001. Following comments from our Stakeholders, changes are being made to its content to make it more user friendly.

- 9,000 posters were sent out to hospitals, Citizens Advice Bureaux, Trading Standards and doctors surgeries in the UK. The poster was also translated into Welsh and 500 copies are now ready for distribution.
- 140 complaints were received at the HAC - a reduction of 31.1% on the previous year.
- In 2003/4 five full disciplinary cases were heard, including the Council's largest ever case against Ambassador Hearing Healthcare plc (formerly Harley Street Hearing Aid Centres plc). The outcome can be found on our website www.thehearingaidcouncil.org.uk. In addition, seven fast track disciplinary cases were heard during the year, with significant benefits of cost and time savings to the dispensers and Disciplinary Committee.
- The HAC continued to play a major part in the development of policy and practice related to hearing aids including reciprocity of qualifications and development of training.
- The HAC was reconfirmed as a Non Departmental Public Body on 1st April 2003.

Chairman's Report



It would be impossible for me to begin my first report as Chairman without paying tribute to the enormous contribution which my predecessor, John Raine, made to the work of the Council during his six years tenure of office. In particular I must thank him for his role in helping the Council to play an active role in protecting consumers both in effectively discharging its disciplinary function and in starting the process of stakeholder dialogue.

Since I took over as Chairman in September 2003, members of the Council, supported by the Registrar and his team, have devoted enormous amounts of time and energy to carry forward this work. I would like to thank all the members of the Council and its staff, and in particular Jonathan Ormerod, Vicki Skeels and Margaret Hughes who have demitted office in the last few months.

I welcome Maryanne Maltby, Gerald Armstrong-Bednall and Michael Bishop who have recently joined the Council and who I know will make a powerful contribution to our work.

Major Developments

COP and CPD

A major project which has come to fruition in the last year has been the preparation of a new code of practice. This code provides more certain and helpful guidance to practitioners in their work. Most importantly it introduces a scheme of CPD to help practitioners and the Council give assurance to members of the public that RHADs are up to date in their practice.

The RHAD Qualification

In recognition of the increasing demands on hearing aid practitioners and the changing shape of education, one key change the Council has introduced is raising the entry qualification for becoming a RHAD to the possession of two A-levels or equivalent.

Discussions have continued throughout the year with representatives of the profession, other audiologists, patient representatives and the Department of Health to find a way of harmonising qualification and professional registration.

The increasing demands of consumers on both private and NHS services mean that this work is of vital importance to help meet rising expectations for quality services.

Governance

Throughout the year much of our effort has been devoted to changing our practices and procedures to those of a public body and ensuring that we are ready to meet public expectations as to transparency. It is anticipated that the Comptroller and Auditor General will become our external auditor and our internal audit services will be provided by the DTI (our sponsoring department). We have continued to work closely with the DTI on improving our governance as well as developing our regulatory role on behalf of consumers and we are very grateful to them and in particular to Kerry Jones, for all the support and guidance they have given.

Publicity and stakeholder engagement

The Council has prioritised improving liaison with consumers and dispensers. In response to feedback, we have continued to develop our website to make it more easily used and informative. Information about the Council is now widely displayed in health and advice settings and relations with the charities for those with hearing impairment and other advisers are being developed. Regular liaison with dispensers through our newsletter and meetings is integral to our strategy.

Disciplinary

During the year one major disciplinary hearing consumed much of our efforts. However the robust stand the Disciplinary Committee took was vindicated by the High Court. The Council has streamlined its investigation procedures and is planning to introduce clear timetables for the resolution of all disciplinary matters.

Looking Forward

For the Council to be truly effective in meeting the needs of consumers for high quality services, we need to build on our work with all stakeholders especially the initiatives we have taken over the last year with consumers and their representatives.

To ensure that the regulation of RHADs responds to the real needs of consumers and dispensers, is proportionate and responsive and is fit for the 21st century we will need over the next year to redouble our efforts to have an effective dialogue with all our stakeholders.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C Hughes', written over a decorative graphic of overlapping light green circles.

Christopher Hughes
Chairman

Meet The HAC

Mr Christopher Hughes (Chairman)



Representing: Independent
Committees: Disciplinary
Committee (Chair), Executive
Committee (Chair),
Examinations Irregularities
Sub-Committee
Term: 1 September 2003 -
31 August 2006 (1st Term)

Mr Gerald Armstrong-Bednall



Representing: Dispensers
Committees: Disciplinary
Committee
Term: 30 April 2004 -
31 December 2007
(1st Term)

Mr Michael Bishop



Representing: Hearing
Impaired
Committees: Disciplinary
Committee, Public Relations
Committee
Term: 16 April 2004 -
31 December 2007
(1st Term)

Mr Anthony Corcoran



Representing: Medical &
Technical
Committees: Disciplinary
Committee, Code of Practice
Committee, Public Relations
Committee
Term: 1 January 2004 -
31 December 2006 (2nd Term)

Mr Mark Georgevic



Representing: Dispensers
Committees: Disciplinary
Committee, Public Relations
Committee, Code of Practice
Committee (Chair),
Examinations Irregularities
Committee, Executive
Committee, Audit Committee
Term: 1 January 2003 - 31
December 2005 (2nd Term)

Mr Maurice Hawthorne



Representing: Medical &
Technical
Committees: Disciplinary
Committee, Examining Body,
Executive Committee,
Scientific Committee
Term: 1 January 2003 -
31 December 2005 (1st Term)

Dr John Irwin



Representing: Medical &
Technical
Committees: Disciplinary
Committee, Examining Body,
Scientific Committee
Term: 1 January 2004 -
31 December 2005
(2nd Term)

Dr Maryanne Maltby



Representing: Dispensers
Committees: Investigating
Committee, Examining Body
Term: 1 April 2004 -
31 December 2007
(1st Term)

Mr Peter Ormerod



Representing: Dispensers
Committees: Disciplinary
Committee, Examining Body
Term: 1 January 2004 -
31 December 2006
(2nd Term)

Ms Christine Pearce



Representing: Hearing
Impaired
Committees: Disciplinary
Committee, Code of Practice
Committee, Public Relations
Committee
Term: 1 January 2002 -
31 December 2004 (2nd Term)

Professor Deepak Prasher



Representing: Medical &
Technical
Committees: Investigating
Committee, Scientific
Committee
Term: 1 January 2002 -
31 December 2004 (1st Term)

Mr Huw Thomas



Representing: Hearing Impaired
Committees: Disciplinary
Committee, Examinations
Irregularities Sub Committee,
Audit Committee (Chair),
Executive Committee
Term: 1 October 2003 -
31 December 2006 (2nd Term)

Ms Denise Yates



Representing: Hearing
Impaired
Committees: Public Relations
(Chair), Investigating
Committee
Term: 1 January 2003 - 31
December 2005 (2nd Term)

Mr Christopher Reid (The Registrar)



Representing: The Hearing
Aid Council
Committees: Attends all
Council & Committee
Meetings

How The H

ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2003/4

- Production and dissemination of 9,000 posters in the UK
- Development of the website - 24,614 hits since its creation
- Co-ordination of the Stakeholders' Meeting
- 3 News releases issued
- HAC members spoke at a variety of different events including BSHAA conferences and seminars, RNID staff training days

WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE IN 2004/5

- The publication of a series of policy consultation documents to seek Stakeholders' views about a range of issues.
- The piloting of a regional roadshow to make the HAC more accessible to RHADs.
- More work with the media to raise the profile of the HAC's work and the standards we expect RHADs to meet.
- An examination of our role in regulating issues such as exhibitions and advertising.
- More work in partnership with consumer bodies to inform and support consumers.
- To undertake a benchmark review of consumer awareness about the private hearing aid market.
- To revise existing consumer focussed marketing material.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2003/4

- 12 cases heard - 60% of these through the new fast track procedure
- Development of the new fast track procedure resulting in savings in both cost and time

WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE IN 2004/5

- Increased use of fast track hearings where appropriate
- Use of directions hearings in appropriate cases to speed up the time from original complaint to resolution
- To set up a monitoring and review system to improve the effectiveness of the Disciplinary process

ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2003/4

- Constituted in 2003. Took over management and development of NDPB status in April 2003

WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE IN 2004/5

- Finalisation of the documentation to support NDPB status
- Implementation of the most effective organisational structure to support the HAC's work as an NDPB
- Implementation of a training structure for staff and Council Members to set up a system to ensure the HAC complies with all relevant legislation.

PR COMMITTEE

Members:

- Tony Corcoran
- Mark Georgevic
- Chrissie Pearce
- Denise Yates - Chairman

Purpose of Committee

To raise the profile of the HAC amongst its Stakeholders

Responsibilities

Press and media, publicity material, exhibitions and conferences, HAC policy on PR and marketing, HAC Update, HAC Annual Report.

DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE

Members:

- Tony Corcoran
- Mark Georgevic
- Maurice Hawthorne
- Christopher Hughes - Chairman from 1 September 2003
- Peter Ormerod
- Chrissie Pearce
- John Raine - Chairman until 31 August 2003
- Vicki Skeels (to December 2003)
- Huw Thomas
- Denise Yates (to March 2004)

Purpose of Committee

To hear and make judgements on the cases placed before it by the Investigating Committee

Responsibilities

To hear cases through fast track hearings, to hear cases at full disciplinary hearing, to make judgements on the basis of the evidence provided and to award costs and issue penalties accordingly.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Members:

- Mark Georgevic
- Maurice Hawthorne
- Chris Hughes - Chairman
- Huw Thomas

Purpose

To take forward the HAC's organisational strategy and development

Responsibilities

NDPB status and documentation, Organisational structure

HAC CO

- 1 Cha
- 4 Dispo
- 4 Cons
- 4 Medical

REGULATE
HEARING AID

HAC Works

COUNCIL

Chairman
Dispensers
Consumers
/Technical

SALE OF
OS IN THE UK

EXAMINING BODY

Members:

- Maurice Hawthorne
- John Irwin - Chairman
- Peter Ormerod
- Vicki Skeels (to March 2004)
- Maryanne Maltby (from April 2004)

Purpose

To coordinate the HAC education and examinations process

Responsibilities

HAC Examinations, HAC pre registered trainees, Reciprocity negotiations, HAC policy on education, examinations and training.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2003/4

- Introduction of CPD scheme September 2004
- Raising of the entry qualification level to 2 "A" levels from September 2004
- Ongoing discussions with a range of organisations regarding the future development of the RHAD qualification
- Review and revision of the examination syllabus
- The development of a more formal training process for examiners to ensure that consistency and fairness is maintained within the examination process

WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE IN 2004/5

- The development of our CPD scheme into a leading edge tool for the development of dispensers
- Greater dialogue with the DoH and the public sector to improve understanding of private dispensing and the work of the HAC
- Evolution of the examination system to keep pace with technological changes in the profession

INVESTIGATING COMMITTEE

Members:

- Margaret Hughes (to March 2004)
- Jonathan Ormerod - Chairman (to March 2004)
- Deepak Prasher
- Vicki Skeels (to March 2004)
- Denise Yates (from April 2004)

Purpose of the Committee

To investigate all complaints made to the HAC

Responsibilities

To look at every complaint placed before it and decide on the course of action required. This could include: requesting further information to enable a decision to be reached about how to progress, interviewing one or both parties to discuss the case, referring the case to the Disciplinary Committee via the HAC's solicitors, closing the case.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2003/4

- 140 cases investigated - 27 ongoing, 12 referred to Disciplinary Committee and 101 closed

WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE IN 2004/5

- A review of the Investigating Committee and how it operates to improve its effectiveness for all stakeholders
- The development of a quality process for dealing with complaints made including providing more feedback to the consumer/RHAD about progress and seeking to secure a speedier resolution of issues

AUDIT COMMITTEE

Members:

- Philip Drye, DTI
- Mark Georgevic
- Huw Thomas (Chairman)
- Representative from National Audit Office

Purpose of Committee

To audit and evaluate all aspects of the HAC's work to ensure it meets the operational standards we have set in the Code of Conduct

Responsibilities

Financial auditing, evaluation of each committee's performance against budget, making recommendations for action as a result of the audit findings

ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2003/4

- Spearheaded the HAC's work towards reconfirmation as an NDPB
- Created a structure to provide an effective ongoing financial evaluation of the HAC

WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE IN 2004/5

- The further development of the internal audit function

Accounts Summary

Un-audited results for the year ended 31st March 2004

One of the changes following the HAC's re-confirmation as a Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB) has been to appoint the National Audit Office (NAO) as our external auditors. Currently we are awaiting the Parliamentary order allowing this to happen which we are expecting in mid-July.

Whilst the audit has been substantially completed, the NAO cannot sign their audit report until this order is approved.

Accordingly, we expect full and audited copies of our accounts to be available in early September.

A brief summary of the un-audited results for the year are:-

	2004 £	2003 £
INCOME		
Registration and Retention Fees	419,575	453,483
Costs and Fines Awarded	310,500	102,725
Examination Fees	72,400	78,230
Other	850	1,100
Bank Interest Receivable	8,296	9,511
	811,621	645,049
GRANT IN AID	145,676	162,086
	£ 957,297	£ 807,135
EXPENDITURE		
Registrar and Administrative Support Fees	122,500	107,566
Meetings and Council Members Fees	75,340	58,600
Examination Costs	74,350	80,824
Disciplinary and Legal Costs	609,217	210,569
Other Operating Costs	163,620	118,143
	£ 1,045,027	£ 575,702
OPERATING (DEFICIT)/SURPLUS	£ (87,730)	£ 231,433

Statistics on Complaints

In the 12 months to 31 March 2004, 140 people submitted complaints to the Hearing Aid Council being 31.1% fewer than in 2003.

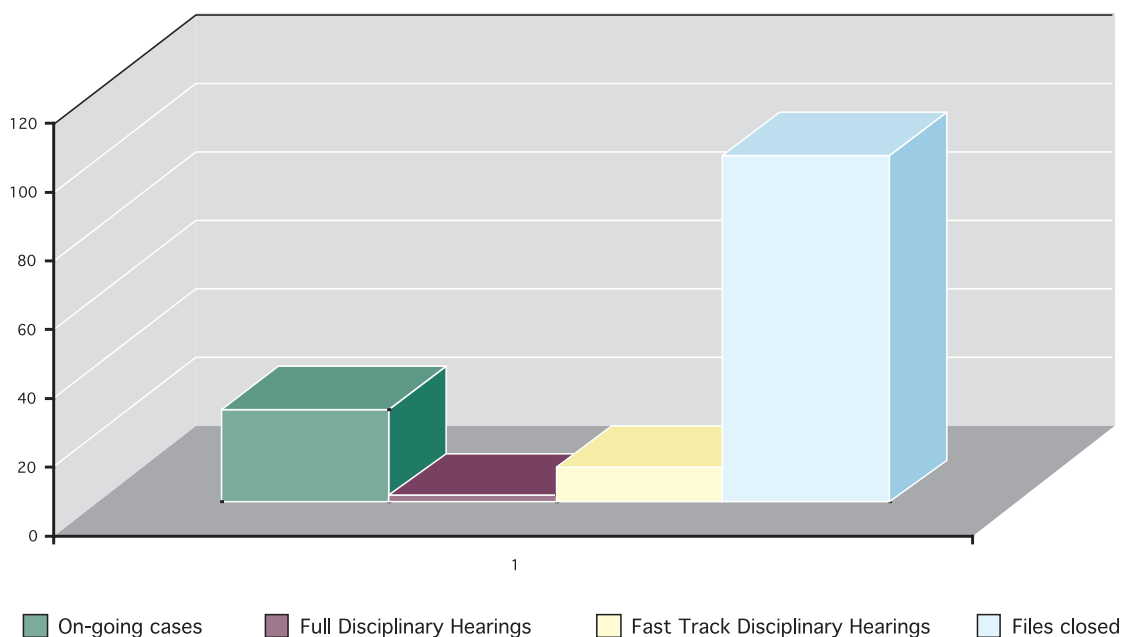
As in previous years, we are always striving to improve our disciplinary process and to this end we have now implemented the use of a complaints screener to help the Registrar with reviewing initial complaints.

This process should speed up the timetable for dealing with complaints and to help reduce the Investigating Committee's work-load.

It is our aim that in the future we will have a small group of screeners that we can use to ensure a completely independent view is given at all times.

As the bar chart below indicates this year of the 140 complaints we have received, 27 cases are ongoing, 10 cases were dealt with using the Fast Track Disciplinary process, 2 cases were heard through the Full Disciplinary process and 101 cases were resolved or no breaches of the Code of Practice were found.

Complaint Statistics 1 April 2003 - 31 March 2004



What We Want To Achieve in 2004/5

- The development of our CPD scheme into a leading edge tool for the development of dispensers.
- Greater dialogue with the Department of Health and the public sector to improve understanding of private dispensing and the work of the HAC.
- The publication of a series of policy consultation documents to seek Stakeholders' views about a range of issues.
- A review of the Investigating Committee and how it operates to improve its effectiveness for all stakeholders.
- The piloting of a regional roadshow to make the HAC more accessible to RHADs.
- More work with the media to raise the profile of the HAC's work and the standards we expect RHADs to meet.
- An examination of our role in regulating issues such as exhibitions and advertising.
- More work in partnership with consumer bodies to inform and support consumers.
- Provision of a sample supply form, fully compliant with the Code of Practice and downloadable from our website.

STOP PRESS | STOP PRESS | STOP PRESS

- In response to feedback from you last year we have been re-designing our website and this will be launched shortly. Please let us have your comments good or bad.
- Photo identity cards are now being issued for all new trainees to gain admittance to HAC examinations.

Dates for the 2004(2) examinations are:

Written Examination - Wednesday 15 September 2004
Practical Examination - w/c Monday 22 November 2004

**Closing date for examination entry forms is
31 July 2004**

Dates for the 2005(1) examinations are:

Written Examination - Wednesday 20 April 2005
Practical Examination - w/c Monday 13 June 2005

**Closing date for examination entry forms is
31 January 2005**

Dates for the 2005(2) examinations are:

Written Examination - Wednesday 28 September 2005
Practical Examination - w/c Monday 21 November 2005

**Closing date for examination entry forms is
31 July 2005**

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