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Dear Registrant

A final letter for this year before we enter what I hope will be a very enjoyable festive period and successful new year for us all. This letter contains some important information about possible changes to our CPD standards, our transfer and legal action which a registered company has initiated against us.

Consultation on introducing HPC CPD compliant standards from 1st April 2009

The Council has decided to consult on introducing new CPD standards from 1st April 2009. Subject to the outcome of the consultation, the Council is minded to replace the current CPD rules with new standards mirroring those applied by the HPC. The new standards would not be points based. Instead we would expect dispensers to use their professional judgement to carry out a range of activities on an ongoing basis which will develop their professional practice.

The Council believes that introducing CPD standards now, which mirror the HPC's, will better prepare dispensers for life at the HPC. After the transfer dispensers will have to meet not just the HPC's Standards for CPD but also Standards of Performance, Conduct and Ethics and Standards of Proficiency. All HPC standards place considerably more emphasis on professional judgement and reflective practice than dispensers may be used to under the HAC Code. Introducing the CPD standards before the transfer would give dispensers a chance to adapt to this new approach in an area of their practice with relatively low clinical risk. After the transfer dispensers will be better equipped to apply the same principles of reflective practice and good judgement to their conduct and proficiency.

The new standards would also be more sensitive to different scopes of practice and specialisation than the current scheme, easier to understand and less onerous to administer thereby helping to minimise retention fees. You will still be required to meet your CPD points target for 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2009 and we will carry out an audit of compliance for that 2 year period.

The consultation is being run through our website until 31 January 2009 and I would urge you to take part. The address is www.thehearingaidcouncil.org.uk and the consultation is clearly linked on the front page.

Transfer update and upcoming retention

I understand that the ongoing uncertainty about when you will transfer to the HPC is difficult. I recently met with the Minister for Trade, Investment and Consumer Affairs, Mr Gareth Thomas MP, who has responsibility for the HAC. We discussed the importance of a smooth transfer and the work the HAC, the HPC, RNID and the industry have undertaken together to ensure it is a success. The Minister congratulated us all on our efforts so far and assured me that his Department will work closely with the Department of Health to ensure you are transferred by March 2010. The HAC will continue in shadow form until July.

Parliament must pass two pieces of legislation to make the transfer a reality. The first was passed in the summer of this year and work on the second is well underway. The HAC is represented on a project board that is driving the legislation forward. The timetable all parties are working to will ensure you are transferred to the HPC in March 2010. As with any legislative process there is a risk that Parliament may reject it or that unrelated events could push our legislation off the agenda (a general election, for example, could cause a significant delay). However, with the strong support from the transfer from the Minister, the industry, consumer groups and both the HAC and HPC, I am very confident that it will proceed as planned.

The Government's choice of a March 2010 date leaves the Council with no option but to levy a retention fee for the period 2009-10 plus a short closedown period. The Council will take an informed decision at its January meeting about what the fee should be. We will write to you in February to notify you with a breakdown of the fee so you can see where each pound is being spent.

At recent events some dispensers have asked if they can see our annual accounts. At the end of each year our annual accounts are independently audited by both the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform and the National Audit Office then laid before Parliament for further scrutiny. If you would like to see the annual accounts then they are published on our website as part of each year's annual report.

Registered employer initiates judicial review of HAC action

Hidden Hearing, a registered employer, has issued court proceedings against the HAC. Hidden Hearing is seeking judicial review of a Guidance Note the HAC published in February 2008. Hidden Hearing's objections focus primarily on activities set out in the Note as constituting dispensing and therefore requiring the individuals completing them to register with

the HAC. A judge granted permission to proceed with the case in July 2008. The hearing will take place on the 13th or 14th January 2009.

While it is not possible to speculate on the outcome of the case, it is clear that it is consuming a considerable amount of the HAC's financial and non-financial resources. The HAC will do all it can to minimise the financial impact however there is a risk that a portion of the cost may need to be met through future retention fees.

The HAC will issue a statement after the hearing in light of any rulings issued by the Court.

HAC office opening over December and January

The HAC office will be closed to public from 4.00pm on Friday 19th December 2008 until 8.30am on Monday 5th January 2009. The office will be open as usual at all other times.

The coming months promise a great deal of change. As ever I would encourage you to keep an eye on our website for important information. You will also hear from us at industry events, in industry publications and working closely with professional bodies to make sure the hearing aid sector has the professional, modern regulation it deserves.

Yours sincerely



Chris Hughes
Chairman