

## **Memorandum of Understanding**

Between the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman  
and the General Dental Council

February 2016

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#### **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is to set out the functions of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) and the General Dental Council (GDC) and to describe the arrangements for co-operation and communication between the two bodies in relation to their respective functions and handling complaints.

Each organisation will take steps to ensure that their staff are aware of what is in the MoU. They will keep staff updated about it, and about the responsibilities it places on each individual member of staff.

This MoU aims to help achieve the statutory functions, objectives and responsibilities of both organisations by:

- securing co-operation and the exchange of information between the SPSO and the GDC subject to any legal constraints, including the need to respect personal or commercial confidentiality;
- fostering mutual understanding and effective relations generally between the two bodies;
- securing consistent treatment of matters which affect them both;
- ensuring an open and transparent relationship between the organisations.

#### **2. Functions of the parties to this memorandum**

##### **2.1 SPSO**

2.1 The SPSO has the functions set out in the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002 ("the 2002 Act"). These include raising awareness of its service, promoting good administrative practice by Scottish public services and leading the development of simplified and standardised complaints handling procedures across the public sector. They also include investigating and reporting on complaints that maladministration, failure to provide a service or failure in a service by NHS organisations and organisations or individuals providing NHS services (including GPs, dentists, pharmacists and opticians) has caused injustice or hardship to a member of the public. The SPSO aims to work in partnership with public services across Scotland to help prevent complaints from arising and to help public services to improve their complaint handling processes.

2.2 The SPSO can consider complaints from members of the public who claim to have sustained injustice or hardship as a result of maladministration or service failure by an authority within the SPSO's jurisdiction. The matter complained about

must also be one that the SPSO is entitled to investigate. Schedule 2 of the 2002 Act lists the authorities that come within the jurisdiction of the SPSO ('listed authorities'). Complaints to SPSO need to first have been made to the listed authority concerned and have completed their complaints process.

## **2.2 GDC**

The GDC registers Dentists and Dental Care Professionals under the Dentist Act 1984. It takes decisions on whether or not a dental professional is suitable to be registered. Registration with the GDC confers the right to practise both NHS and private dentistry anywhere in the UK.

The GDC:

- maintains registers of qualified dental professionals;
- sets standard of dental practice and conduct;
- assures the quality of dental education;
- ensures professionals keep up-to-date;
- helps patients with complaints about a dentist or a dental professional; and
- works to strengthen patient protection

The GDC has statutory powers to take action where there are concerns about the fitness to practise (FTP) of a registered dentist or dental care professional. This includes those registrants whose fitness to practise is affected by their health.

## **3. Consultation and co-operation**

SPSO and GDC agree that where the functions and actions of one body affect the functions and actions of the other, they will consult and co-operate together in order to fulfil their respective functions as fully, effectively and efficiently as possible. This co-operation will include the sharing of appropriate information and maintaining effective communication where this will inform and improve the work of each party.

Within available resources, SPSO and GDC will invite representation from the other party to project teams, work groups etc where both parties believe there would be advantage in joint working. The two parties will encourage formal and informal contacts between their staff to raise awareness of the roles, responsibilities and methods of working of each.

## **4. Sharing information**

SPSO and GDC recognise that certain issues may be submitted (or may be capable of being submitted) to both organisations. In these circumstances, the bodies undertake to liaise as far as possible having due regard to the requirements on each to comply fully with relevant data protection and confidentiality obligations. The focus of such liaison will be to ensure that the wishes of the person raising the concerns is respected and that they are given the best possible advice about the options open to them. Particular care will be taken to avoid situations where concerns are not properly considered because of confusion about where to signpost an individual or whether an individual has been signposted.

This MoU may be supplemented by a separate information sharing or complaints handling agreement which will set out detailed arrangements where appropriate.

## **5. Public information and information to other organisations**

Before issuing any guidance, publicity and information to the public or other organisations about any aspect of their current or proposed functions relating to complaints, each party will consider the extent to which it would assist the other in the effective and efficient discharge of its functions if mention were made of that organisation and its functions. Where relevant and possible, each party will invite the other to participate in any conferences, seminars or workshops it organises.

## **6. Liaison meetings**

SPSO and GDC representatives will meet as appropriate to consider matters of mutual interest arising from their respective functions.

## **7. Monitoring and reviewing this memorandum**

SPSO and GDC will ensure that the other has been provided with appropriate named contacts to liaise as required to carry out day to day business. Either party may suggest amendments to the MoU.

Where either party identifies problems in operating this MoU, it will seek to resolve them quickly and informally. If this is not possible then the Ombudsman and the Chief Executive of GDC will take responsibility for achieving a mutually acceptable resolution. Their decision will be final.

## **8. Key contacts and dispute resolution**

Details of key contacts are set out in appendix 1.

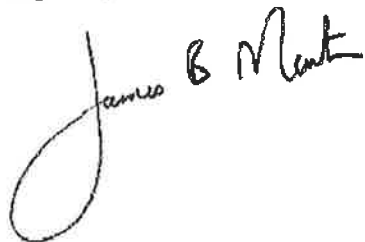
In the event of any dispute, representatives of the signatories agree to discuss how best to resolve the issues at an appropriate level. This discussion should take place as soon as reasonably practicable. If this does not resolve the dispute, the issue will be referred to the Chief Executives of the signatories, who shall endeavour to agree an appropriate resolution.

## **9. Duration and review**

This MOU will be effective from February 2016. It is not time limited and will continue until varied or otherwise as agreed by the signatories.

Signatures to the Memorandum

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James B Martin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'J'.

Name: Jim Martin  
Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

Date: 8 February 2016

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ian Brack". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'I'.

Name: Ian Brack  
Chief Executive  
General Dental Council

Date: 11 February 2016