

Stream 2: Guidance for employers and contracting organisations

- 1 This fact sheet explains how we handle those complaints that do not require a full GMC investigation but warrant a preliminary investigation in which we contact a doctor's employer(s)/contracting organisation(s) to ask them as to whether or not there are any immediate concerns about the doctor's fitness to practise.

The role of the GMC

- 2 Our powers and our sanctions are linked to our responsibilities for maintaining the register of doctors able to practise medicine in the UK. Our fitness to practise powers focus on the most serious concerns that may call into a question a doctor's fitness to practise medicine and their suitability to retain unrestricted registration as a doctor.

How we handle complaints

- 3 We receive around 5,000 complaints each year. Many of these complaints do not appear to raise issues that would require us to take action to remove or restrict a doctor's right to practise. We normally only investigate complaints that could result in formal action. However, we try to ensure that those complaints that we do not investigate are forwarded quickly to the most appropriate organisation, normally the doctor's employer or contracting body.
- 4 We review all new complaints to identify those that we need to investigate ourselves because the issues are potentially serious. We refer to these as Stream 1 complaints.
- 5 Many of the complaints we receive fall outside this category and can often best be dealt with under local procedures for considering complaints. This is because the concerns raised are, on their own, unlikely to require us to take formal action against the doctor. We refer to these as stream 2 complaints.
- 6 In stream 2 complaints we will conduct a preliminary investigation in which we will contact the doctor's employer/contracting body and ask them to confirm

whether there are any immediate concerns about the doctor's fitness to practise that might require any further GMC investigation.

What action is expected of the employer?

- 8 When we contact the doctor's employer(s)/contracting organisation(s), it is a matter for the employer to decide what action, if any, is required. In particular, the employer will need to decide whether they need to investigate the complaint.
- 9 We ask the employer to confirm whether they are aware of any serious concerns about the doctor that might require us to take action to protect patients.

What will happen if the employer identifies any concerns?

- 10 If the doctor's employer(s)/contracting organisation(s) identify any fitness to practise concerns about the doctor, either relating to the particular complaint or more generally, we will undertake our own investigation into the doctor's fitness to practise, within our stream 1 process. At the end of our preliminary investigation two case examiners will decide whether to refer the doctor to a Fitness to Practise Panel hearing to consider the doctor's fitness to practise.

Further contact with the complainant

- 11 When we have contacted the doctor's employer(s)/contracting organisation(s) we will not normally contact the complainant again, unless we later decide to carry out our own investigation if additional information raises fitness to practise concerns. You will need to consider what communication with the complainant is required.

Further information

- 12 More information about the GMC's fitness to practise procedures is available on our website www.gmc-uk.org.