

LICENSING

Frequently Asked
Questions for Employers

General
Medical
Council

Regulating doctors
Ensuring good medical practice

The General Medical Council will introduce licences to practise on Monday 16 November 2009. They are the first practical step towards the introduction of revalidation.

From Monday 16 November, doctors will, by law, be required to hold registration with a licence to practise in order to practise medicine in the UK and exercise various legal privileges (such as writing prescriptions or signing death certificates).

The introduction of licensing has important implications for doctors' employers and other organisations that contract or commission the services of doctors.

This document contains a series of Frequently Asked Questions about licensing to help organisations prepare for this change in medical regulation.

Additional information about licensing can be found on our website – www.gmc-uk.org/licensing. You can also email your questions to licensing@gmc-uk.org.

Q. Why will a doctor need to hold a licence to practise?

When licensing is introduced on 16 November 2009, it will be the licence to practise, rather than registration, that will give a doctor the legal authority to undertake the activities currently restricted by law to doctors who are registered with the GMC.

These activities include, but are not limited to, prescribing, signing death or cremation certificates, and holding certain medical posts (such as working as a doctor in the NHS).

Q. What form will the licence take?

We will not issue certificates or cards to confirm a doctor's GMC status. This is because these items would only be accurate at the time they are produced and a doctor's GMC status could change. There are also security considerations.

After licensing is introduced, employers can check a doctor's GMC status by accessing our online Register (the List of Registered Medical Practitioners) at www.gmc-uk.org/register.

Q. How will doctors be informed of their new GMC status?

After licensing is introduced on 16 November 2009, we will write to all registered doctors to confirm their new GMC status. This will confirm whether they hold registration with or without a licence to practise.

Q. Will there be any changes to the online Register when licensing is introduced?

When licensing is introduced on 16 November 2009, the online Register (the List of Registered Medical Practitioners) will be updated to show the new GMC status of every doctor. Employers will be able to distinguish between doctors who are:

- Registered with a licence to practise; or
- Registered without a licence to practise.

The online Register will include a new multiple search function, allowing employers to check the GMC status of up to 10 doctors at once. In addition a doctor's record will display the due date of their annual retention fee.

Q. Will the GMC continue to issue certificates to doctors after licensing is introduced?

Yes, doctors will continue to receive a certificate when first granted provisional and/or full registration. This is required by law. These certificates will not state whether a doctor holds a licence to practise.

There will be some changes to other certificates. We will no longer issue:

- **Annual Registration Certificates** but will instead issue a letter confirming receipt of a doctor's annual retention fee.
- **Certified copies of a doctor's entry on the Register** or any other certificates confirming changes in a doctor's GMC status. Instead when requested, we will send a doctor a new Proof of Entry on the Register letter. This will confirm the doctor's name, GMC reference number, primary medical qualification, their registration and licensing history, details of any entry on the Specialist and GP Registers, and any restrictions relating to fitness to practise on the doctor's medical practice.

Employers must always remember that certificates or letters do not constitute a guarantee that a doctor is currently registered or licensed, nor do they act as proof of identity. For the most current and up-to-date status of a doctor, the online Register (the List of Registered Medical Practitioners) should always be checked.

Q. How should employers check the new GMC status of their doctors after 16 November 2009?

All organisations will be able to check the GMC status of their doctors by visiting the online Register (the List of Registered Medical Practitioners) and entering a doctor's GMC reference number. From 16 November 2009, the online Register will include a new multiple search function. This will allow employers to search for up to 10 doctors at once.

Users of the NHS Electronic Staff Record (ESR) and the Scottish Workforce Information Standard System (SWISS) may wish to use these systems to verify their doctors' new GMC status on Monday 16 November.

Other organisations may be interested in our LRMP data download service, particularly large employers that employ 100+ doctors. The current subscription

service allows users to download the entire online Register in a 'flat file'. This file may be imported into organisations' existing databases provided they already contain doctors' GMC reference numbers.

For more information about the LRMP download service, please visit www.gmc-uk.org/lrmpdownload.

Q. What should employers do now to prepare for licensing?

Organisations that employ or contract the services of doctors should review (and revise where appropriate) any policies and procedures they have in place for conducting pre-employment checks.

Contracts that currently require doctors to possess registration with the GMC as a condition of their employment should be reviewed in light of the new arrangements.

Organisations that have teams in place for dealing with HR issues for doctors should ensure that they are aware that licensing will be introduced on 16 November 2009; and that they are familiar with the changes that will be made to the online Register (the List of Registered Medical Practitioners) and GMC certificates from this date.

Arrangements should also be made for checking the new GMC status of doctors from 16 November 2009.

A helpful checklist can be found in our resource pack for doctors' employers and other organisations. This can be downloaded from our website at www.gmc-uk.org/licensing.

Q. The NHS Electronic Staff Record (ESR) includes a GMC interface. How will this system change on 16 November 2009?

Since 2008, the ESR system used by the NHS in England and Wales has included a GMC interface. This provides an overview of a doctor's registration status as well as background registration information. The system also sends alerts to designated contacts when a doctor's registration status changes.

ESR has developed the interface to reflect this change in medical regulation. On Monday 16 November 2009, ESR users will be able to use the system to check the new GMC status of their doctors.

The ESR system will generate a report that will show the new GMC status of all doctors working in a particular organisation. Doctors who from 16 November 2009 are registered without a licence to practise will appear at the top of this report, and will be colour-coded 'red' so as to be clearly visible.

ESR will provide a briefing to users ahead of the introduction of the licence. If you have any queries about the development of ESR, please contact your ESR NHS Account Manager or ESR Service Delivery Manager. Alternatively, please email communications@esrsolution.co.uk.

Q. Will similar arrangements be in place in Scotland?

Colleagues in Scotland with access to the NHS SWISS system will similarly be able to check a doctor's GMC status from 16 November 2009 onwards. The SWISS system will contain the new licensing terminology from this date.

For more information, please email nss.swiss@nhs.net or visit www.eyou.scot.nhs.uk.

Q. How can organisations outside the NHS or those without access to ESR or SWISS check the new GMC status of their doctors on 16 November 2009?

All organisations will be able to check the GMC status of their doctors by visiting the online Register (the List of Registered Medical Practitioners) and entering a doctor's GMC reference number. From 16 November 2009, the online Register will include a new multiple search function. This will allow employers to search for up to 10 doctors at once.

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Email: licensing@gmc-uk.org

Website: www.gmc-uk.org/licensing

The GMC is a charity registered in England and Wales (1089278) and Scotland (SC037750)

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Q. What should we do on 16 November 2009 if a doctor does not have a licence but needs one?

Ask the doctor to contact us immediately because they will need to apply for a licence.

We will have dedicated staff available to fast track a doctor's application. There will be no charge for this application. We will require the doctor's application to be accompanied by a declaration from their current or most recent employer and a certificate of good standing if the doctor has been working outside the UK.

Q. What happens if a doctor has not told the GMC whether or not they require a licence?

All registered doctors are entitled to a licence to practise. This means that in the event that we do not receive a doctor's decision about whether or not they want to take a licence, we will automatically grant a licence provided a doctor continues to be registered at the time licensing is introduced.

More than 96% of doctors (212,000) on the medical register have confirmed what they want their GMC status to be from Monday 16 November*. Of these doctors, around 94% have said they wish to be registered with a licence to practise, while 6% have asked to be registered without a licence.

*Information correct as of 20 October 2009

Q. Does licensing mean the start of revalidation?

No. The first revalidations will not happen before 2011. However, the introduction of the licence to practise is the first practical step towards this new approach in medical regulation.

For more information about revalidation, please visit www.gmc-uk.org/revalidation.

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