

Please find below some general comments in relation to the Open data Consultation submitted on behalf of the General Medical Council. We have only responded to questions with direct relevance to the work of the GMC.

The purpose of the General Medical Council (GMC) is to protect, promote and maintain the health and safety of the public by ensuring proper standards in the practice of medicine.

The law gives us four main functions under the *Medical Act 1983*:

- keeping up-to-date registers of qualified doctors
- fostering good medical practice
- promoting high standards of medical education and training
- dealing firmly and fairly with doctors whose fitness to practise is in doubt.

Section One

Qu. 2. p.6

The process of preparing data for re-use may be resource intensive for many organisations. Accordingly, we feel that data should be made available where demand exists or is likely to exist. In practice, demand can be gauged by bodies subject to a statutory access regime such as FOIA by reviewing the types of requests they receive for data. Request patterns develop over time and it is possible to assess the likely demand for a particular data set.

We also support the general scope proposition outlined on page 13 of the consultation document. Accessible data should be non-personal in nature: large datasets routinely collected by public services and user feedback on services should be made available to applicants.

Qu. 5 p.6

We believe that some form of regulatory oversight in this context may be helpful. This may take a light-touch form, with a regulator acting as an intermediary between the applicant and the public authority where disclosure has been refused. The development of a right of appeal and external scrutiny of an organisation's decision-making in respect of disclosure may prove useful.

Section Eight

Qu. 3 p.25

The GMC publishes the Medical Register. The Medical Register provides registration information about all doctors in the UK – their registration status, qualifications and specialties. We provide an online search facility as well as a downloadable CSV data file. The information contained in the Medical Register is personal data as defined by the Data Protection Act 1998. While we recognise this information is in the public domain, we believe it is important to place some restrictions on usage and we are pleased to note that the protection of personal data has been acknowledged in the consultation. We believe the de-scoping of personal data from the Open Data framework is reasonable and proportionate. This allows organisations such as the GMC to manage the distribution of personal data in a DPA-compliant manner.

Qu. 2 p.30

We support the adoption of internal review and appeals processes. Board-level responsibility for Open Data accessibility would contribute to this. This could mirror the processes in place for access to information under the FOIA regime. An internal appeals process, perhaps within a wider regulatory framework, is likely to support an open dialogue between applicants and public authorities. Information governance responsibility could sit with the same board member; however, this could equally be delegated to an information governance or information security lead.

Qu. 4 p.32

In our context, we believe that data quality is extremely important. We believe it is essential to ensure data is accurate and up to date prior to release. Similarly, it is important to ensure that explanatory information is provided to applicants in order to contextualise data. We feel it is counter-productive to release entirely un-polished/unchecked data. We recognise this has resource implications for many organisations, for example, in some circumstances it may be necessary to secure the services of a professional statistician to generate meaningful and accurate datasets. This is especially important where there is a potential to identify individuals from anonymous data – additional preparation may be required in this context.

Qu. 1 p.33

We believe that a central portal for public sector data may be useful. Data.gov.uk may provide such a focal point. An offering similar to direct.gov.uk, viewed as a “one stop shop” may be helpful for those seeking public sector data,

Please feel free to contact me if you would like to clarify any of the points I've made.

Regards

Andrew Ledgard