United Kingdom Council
1 November 2014

Report to Principal Executive Committee, standing committees, and branches

1. Summary
The United Kingdom (UK) Council met on 1 November 2014. This report contains a summary of the issues discussed.

2. Annual Retention Fee
Mick Armstrong (Chair of the Principal Executive Committee) and Peter Ward (Chief Executive) provided an update on the BDA’s actions in regard to the decision of the General Dental Council to increase the Annual Retention Fee (ARF) by 55%. The GDC Council had met on 30 October and had decided to proceed with this option, taking the ARF to £895.

This news had come as the BDA announced that its application for a ‘rolled – up’ judicial review proceedings against the GDC and the ARF rise had been granted. Essentially this is a fast-tracked process that will enable resolution of the case in early December and before dentists are legally bound to pay the ARF on 31 December 2014.

Mick Armstrong underlined the determination of the BDA to pursue the judicial review, referring to the failure of the GDC to make a case for the increase, and for a deeply flawed consultation process on the options.

The UK Council expressed its deep concern at the decision of the GDC to proceed with a wholly unjustified increase, and to give its full support to the Principal Executive Committee in pursuing a legal challenge to the GDC.

3. General Dental Council
The following motion was proposed by Jim Lafferty on behalf of the English Country Council:

‘The United Kingdom Council believes that the General Dental Council is no longer fit for purpose’

This prompted a wider discussion, beyond the ARF dispute, about our concerns about the GDC as a regulator. The motion was passed with unanimous support.
4. Armed Forces Committee: current issues

We received a briefing from Brigadier Iain Pretsell, Chair of the Armed Forces Committee, on the work of his committee and current issues. This proved to be a very thorough survey of key points, and we expressed our gratitude to Brigadier Pretsell for increasing our understanding of the challenges that he and his colleagues are tackling.

Although this was the last meeting of the UK Council in this triennium, we recommended that the new UK Council allow time on each agenda for a particular craft to make an extended presentation on current issues beyond the normal report.

4. Membership/Finance

We received an update on membership figures and finance.

The membership year 2013/14 was the first full year of membership under the new structure. Membership numbers for dentists within each membership tier remained relatively stable throughout the year, with the bulk of members remaining in the Essential package. A steady number of members upgraded each month to either Extra or Expert.

The main renewals in the current membership year were roughly in line with expectations, although there was some variation across the membership tiers. Recruitment campaigns are conducted in the context of an environment where there is a great deal of pressure on dentists’ incomes. It is still early in the life of the new membership structure to gain detailed analysis and data that can inform expectations of behaviour, though this is building steadily.

We received a copy of the August financial accounts, and these reflected a strong performance for the Association in regard to its budget for 2013/14. The financial year ended at the end of September, and while there was still a significant exercise underway in regard to the end of year accounting and auditing, it now seems probable that the Association will be shown to have ended the year significantly ahead of budget, which had provided for an end of year deficit of £716,000.

5. Stress in the Profession

We have recommended to the PEC that they prioritise policy activity around analysis of the issues causing professional stress, and the range and quality of support for colleagues who are suffering stress and sometimes severe mental illness. We have heard numerous and disturbing accounts of individuals who have found themselves in a state of life threatening desperation. We want to keep this on our agenda and press the Association to do all it can to help colleagues and their families who are suffering in this regard.

We received an update about the policy and research activity that is progressing, and an assurance from the PEC that this remains a firm priority.

6. PEC’s strategic review

The PEC will undertake a review of its strategic priorities next February, when the five new members of the PEC are elected. Mick Armstrong shared a paper with us that had recently been discussed by the PEC setting out a range of strategic themes that were likely to inform
their review. We considered that these were sensible priorities, and we were particularly pleased to see that stress in the profession was stated as one of them.

In other issues concerning the PEC, we asked that consideration continue to be given to how particular crafts could engage and input to the work of the PEC, including the suggestion that craft constituency seats on the PEC itself might be appropriate. Mick Armstrong stated that he intended to meet with all the craft committee chairs once the triennial elections were complete, and lines of communication between the PEC and craft committees would be included in those discussions. He underlined his invitation to any craft committee chair to attend a meeting of the PEC if there were issues they wished to discuss directly with the PEC.

7. Annual Report

The PEC has a responsibility under the Articles of Association to deliver an annual report on its activities to the UK Council. We approved a proposal for delivery of the Annual Report that would involve the Scrutiny Committee (elected by the UK Council) considering an accountability report from the PEC and senior staff and then submitting a report of this review meeting to the UK Council. We also approved a transitory timetable for this process that envisages the Scrutiny Committee meeting with the PEC and submitting its report to the UK Council in mid to late March 2015. Thereafter the meeting and report will be each January.

Graham Brown is the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, along with Catherine DuBourg and Dave Cottam. We decided it would be sensible for the same personnel for the Scrutiny Committee to remain in place until the first review and report process next March is complete irrespective of the outcome of the elections to the country councils at the end of February. The UK Council will then consider the composition of the Scrutiny Committee for the new Triennium at its first meeting in 2015. In reality there is likely to be little overlap, but we did think the accountability and review process would be more robust with the same personnel throughout.

8. Reports from the Country Councils

Each of the country council chairs presented a report, and responded to questions.

Other reports included those from the Principal Executive Committee, the Education, Ethics and the Dental Team Working Group; a report on the BDA’s initiative on holding a one day expert summit on antimicrobial resistance on 10 November; an update on improvements to the website; a report from the Student Committee; and oral updates from the Chair of the General Dental Practice Committee and Chair of the Salaried Dentists Committee. The report from the Chair of the Salaried Dentists Committee highlighted concern about the apparently stretched staffing resources in the Employment Relations Team.

We expressed disappointment that there were not reports from a wider group of craft committees, and also that some meetings had not occurred due to lack of business. We hope that there will be more reports for the next and future meetings, and as already mentioned we will offer an extended platform at each meeting for a particular craft to report on their issues in more detail.
9. Matters for the Principal Executive Committee

It was agreed to refer the following issues to the Principal Executive Committee: the motion regarding the GDC; stress in the profession; approval of the process for the delivering the Annual Report, and commending this to the PEC; resources in the Employment Relations team; apparent lack of proactivity on the part of some committees.

10. Dates of future meetings

Provisional dates for the UK Council in 2015:

- 10.30am Saturday 25 April
- 10.30am Saturday 14 November

Sue Greening  
Chair of Welsh Council (rotational Chair of UK Council)  

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