

Executive Summary – Options Appraisal

Introduction

The NRCPD board recognises its current regulatory form will not be sustainable in the long term due to both internal and external considerations.

Internally, the size of the regulated workforce, the costs of voluntary regulation, its relationship with Signature, registrants and other stakeholders are all key issues that need addressing in the future regulation of communication professionals.

Externally, there are influencing factors arising from a plethora of official reports and reviews following the Mid-Staffs scandal, for changing how voluntary registration bodies operate and how professions in general are regulated.

In July 2013, the NRCPD board commissioned this options appraisal to help it make informed decisions about any changes in the way communication professionals are regulated and how regulation is delivered.

Consultation for the project included an online survey for key stakeholders and a number of scoping interviews. 14 options were fully costed with six put forward for full consideration at the NRCPD board meeting. Each option was then discussed to identify advantages, disadvantages and risks and appraised against a set of objective assessment criteria that NRCPD wants to achieve in the regulation of communication professionals.

The options considered

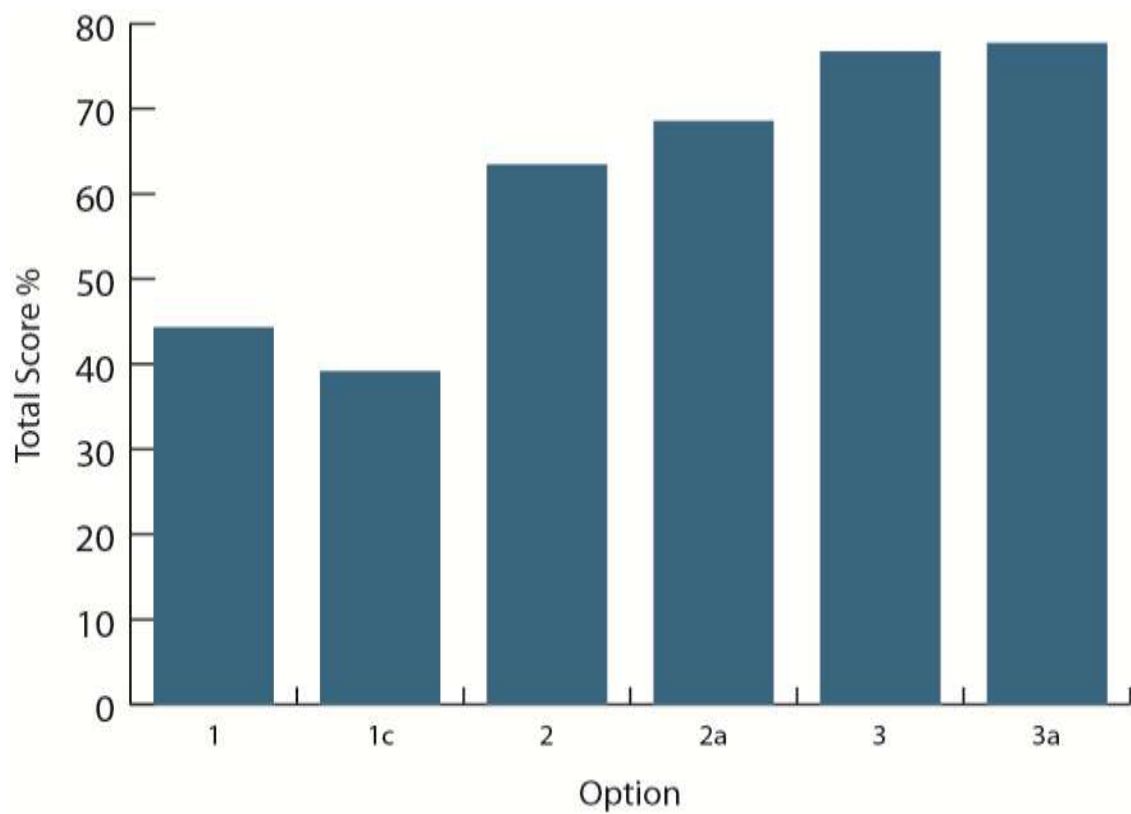
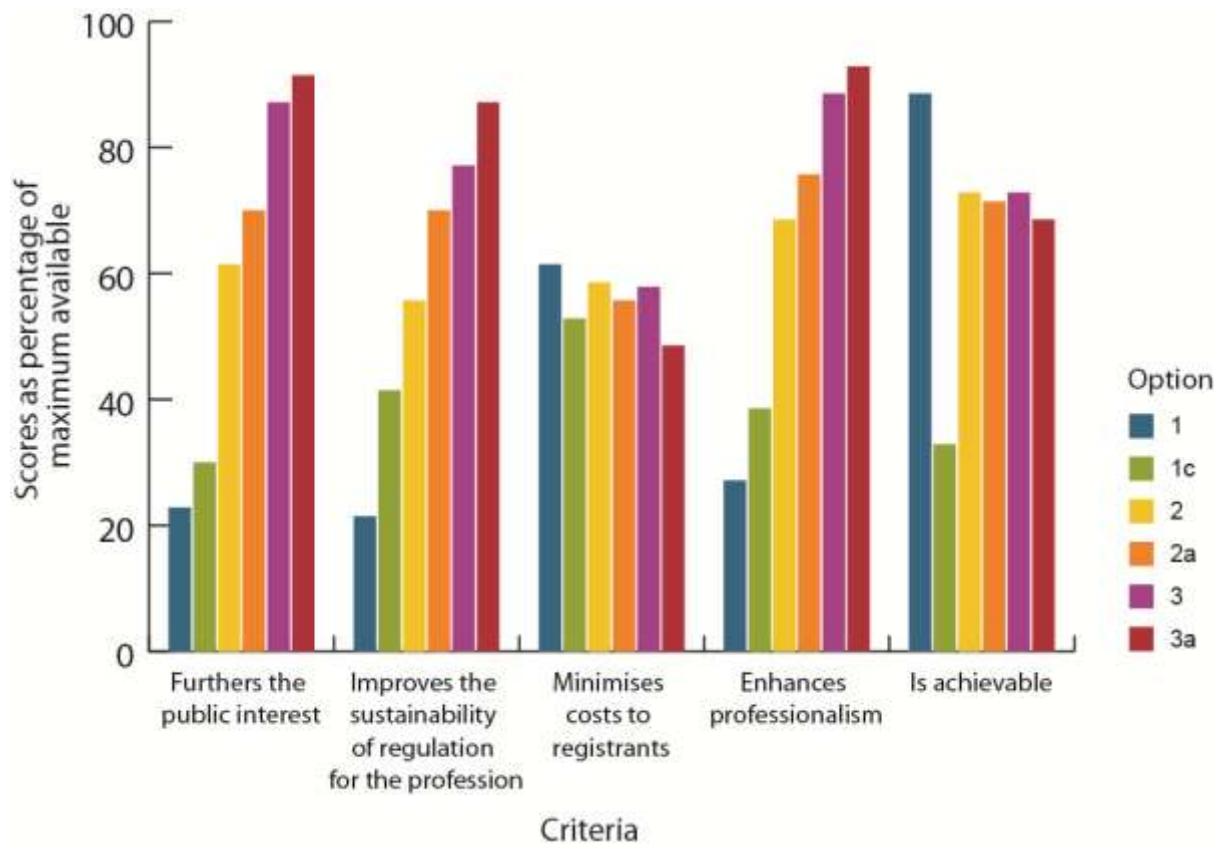
The six options considered at the NRCPD board included changes to how communication professionals are regulated and by whom that regulation is delivered. Each option had a number of advantages and disadvantages. The options were appraised as follows:

- **No change (the status quo option) (option 1).** It is considered good practice to include a status quo or 'do nothing' scenario to benchmark other options. This option has several advantages (including that it would allow NRCPD to 'wait and see' on the fallout from the Mid Staffs scandal and is affordable), but the Board's consensus was this was not realistic, particularly given feedback from registrants through the survey. This feedback was generally focused on the need to make improvements in how NRCPD communicates with and involves registrants and demonstrates value for money.
- **Make no changes to how communication professionals are regulated and merge with another registration body (option 1c).** This option does not involve any changes to the standards required of registrants or the system used to demonstrate registrants have attained these standards, but rather focuses on back office changes to reduce costs per registrant. Board members discussed the possibility that NRCPD could merge with other bodies, and whether such a merger process would maintain standards and reduce costs.

Questions were also raised about whether this option would address the key drivers in terms of how communication professionals are regulated.

- **Voluntary + (option 2).** This option would involve making potentially substantive changes to how communication professionals are regulated with no or minimal changes to how NRCPD is organised and its relationship with Signature. Achieving this option would use the Professional Standards Authority (PSA) standards for accredited voluntary registers as the model for how communication professionals are regulated. Accreditation with the PSA would not be necessary. Board members queried whether such substantive change would be worth implementing without becoming PSA accredited. This scenarios was contrasted with the PSA's existing focus on the regulation of health and social care professions as many communication professionals work in legal or educational settings.
- **Voluntary + and make NRCPD more independent within Signature (option 2a).** This option would change the way communication professionals are regulated while also altering the organisational structure of NRCPD and its relationship with Signature. Board members considered this option may address some of the perceptions around the role and function of NRCPD within Signature. This would take time and money but would provide good opportunities to communicate with and involve registrants and other key stakeholders.
- **PSA accreditation (option 3).** This is similar to the previous option and the Board discussed the NRCPD becoming accredited with the PSA with the distinct advantage that NRCPD meets a 'gold standard' in terms of how it regulates. The cost issues and the lack of any changes to the organisational arrangements were also discussed.
- **PSA accreditation and make NRCPD more independent within Signature (option 3a).** This would involve making changes to how NRCPD regulates and achieving PSA accreditation as well as making changes to the organisational structure and the relationship between NRCPD and Signature. Issues around funding were discussed by the board in relation to this option.

Board members were then asked to score each option against five assessment criteria; that any option should further the public interest, improve the sustainability of regulation of the profession, minimise costs to registrants, enhance professionalism in the regulated groups and be achievable. The graphs below present the outcome of this scoring process.



This assessment suggests Members favoured options involved achieving PSA accreditation whether on a voluntary or formal basis, and also favoured those options which made NRCPD more independent though remaining within the Signature “family”.

Next steps

The board agreed that stakeholder involvement and consultation was an essential next step. Prior to that there should be an assessment of NRCPD’s current position against the PSA requirements for accreditation, together with an assessment of the resource implications of implementing any changes

The Board’s communication strategy should cover a wide stakeholder audience to include the public and service users, registrants, professional bodies, commissioners and others.

ENDS