An evaluation of the introduction of legally qualified chairs – interim report (May 2016)

What did the evaluation involve?
Between 4 January 2016 and 31 March 2016, legally qualified chairs were used in 34 Medical Practitioner Tribunal (MPT) review hearings, and 306 Interim Order Tribunal (IOT) hearings. 720 surveys were issued to legally qualified chairs, tribunal members, tribunal clerks and legal representatives following each legally qualified chair led hearing. 422 completed surveys were received from: 166 tribunal members; 85 legally qualified chairs; 81 tribunal clerks; 38 doctor’s representatives and 37 GMC representatives.

Why did we carry out the evaluation?
Legally qualified chairs were introduced to MPTS hearings in January 2016, following the introduction of the General Medical Council (Legal Assessors and Legally Qualified Persons) Rules Order of Council 2015. This means that where there is a legally qualified chair, it is not necessary for a legal assessor to be appointed to either a MPT or IOT hearing. The legally qualified chair is a member of the decision-making tribunal. We carried out the evaluation to ensure that the introduction of legally qualified chairs was effective, and to address concerns raised in the consultation period. The evaluation will also assist us to consider how we will extend the use of legally qualified chairs.

What were the key findings?
Question 1: Was the tribunal process explained well?

- Where the doctor was unrepresented, over half of respondents (58%) agreed or strongly agreed that the tribunal process was clearly explained and that questions were dealt with appropriately, while 1% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.
Question 2: Was the time well managed?

- 61% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that time management of the hearing was effective, while 3% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Question 3: Did the legally qualified chair give legal advice?

- 58% of respondents stated that the legally qualified chair advised on questions of law as to evidence or procedure during the hearing.

Question 4: Did the tribunal work well together?

- 97% of tribunal clerks and members felt that the tribunal worked together effectively or very effectively.

Question 5: Overall, how did you find the hearing?

- 47% of respondents felt that overall the legally qualified led hearing was advantageous or very advantageous, while 9% of respondents felt that overall it was disadvantageous or very disadvantageous.

Please see the attached graphical representation of the data.

What are the next steps?

We will continue to use legally qualified chairs in IOT hearings and MPT reviews where possible. Meanwhile, we are considering the implementation of legally qualified chairs in further types of hearings and will trial this in due course.