**RCOT response to the HCPC consultation ‘A consultation on permanent changes to our Rules to hold remote hearings’ (online consultation).**

***Q1: We would like to amend our Rules so that we can continue to hold hearings remotely once the emergency period ends, where it is fair and practical to do so.***

***Do you think there are any reasons why we should not be able to hold remote hearings once the emergency period ends?***

*Answer:* ***Yes***

*Please explain your answer.*

RCOT is not opposed to the use of remote hearings in appropriate circumstances and recognises that remote hearings can be beneficial to all parties. However, remote hearings should only take place where a registrant consents to this mode of hearing.

It is important to acknowledge that remote hearings are not appropriate in all cases.

An important factor which must also be considered is the impact of remote hearings on registrants and the technology available to them e.g. lack of/poor internet connection/Wi-Fi signal, not having access to a computer.

Information Technology skills vary from person to person, and some people are not comfortable or competent with meetings taking place virtually.

***Q2: Do you consider there are any equality and diversity implications for groups or individuals as a result of the proposed change to our Rules?***

*Answer:* ***Yes***

If yes, please explain what could be done to change this.

Clear risks to persons with protected characteristics could arise from the HCPC acquiring a right to impose remote hearings without a registrant’s consent.

* some registrants who have Autism have struggled with attending hearings remotely, as they have found it difficult to cope with multiple faces on a computer screen.
* some registrants with severe dyslexia have stated that the experience of attempting to go through large evidence bundles remotely whilst simultaneously following proceedings on screen has been extremely challenging.
* Some registrants experiencing mental health issues, have reported that they don’t feel able to cope with being alone throughout their virtual hearing.
* Some older registrants have expressed distress at their lack of ability to engage with the technology required for a remote hearing.

Individual considerations must be conducted in each case where a remote hearing is proposed.

Many registrants appear before the HCPC unrepresented, and some would be ill-equipped to make the legal arguments necessary to oppose a remote hearing (or even appreciate that they might be able to do so).

Therefore, remote hearings should only take place with the consent of the registrant concerned.