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The Institute of Trichologists

COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE

For Registered Trichologists

DOCUMENTATION

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CONCERNS ABOUT A TRICHOLOGIST

As a UK regulator of Trichology, the Registration Council (RC) investigates concerns and complaints about registrants of the Institute of Trichologists (IOT Trichologists) that are made by patients, their families, members of the public or other healthcare professionals, including fellow Trichologists.

The role of the Registration Council (RC) is to investigate potential breaches of the IOT Code of Professional Practise and Ethics and take action if a breach is established. We have robust processes to investigate allegations against IOT Trichologists that are specifically designed to protect the patients and the public, including those who are vulnerable to risks. All IOT Trichologists must be registered with the IOT and follow the standards within our Code of Practise before they can practise. The Code sets out clearly the expected professional and personal behaviour of Trichologists. If, after investigation, the RC establish that a registered IOT Trichologist's practise or conduct falls below the standards expected of them, this could prohibit or restrict their practise. In serious cases an IOT Trichologist may be removed from the register, and no longer able to practise as an IOT Trichologist.

The IOT recognises and regulates individuals, not companies. A registrant is not automatically accountable if their company departs from the expected standards or accepted practises. For there to be a breach of the Code, there should be a demonstrable element of discredit upon the Registrant's behaviour.

We can only deal with complaints about alleged breaches of the Code of Professional Practise and Ethics. If your dispute relates to a company or its policies. you should complain directly with the organisation and/or seek other legal remedies.

The Registration Council aims to ensure that the investigation and Conduct procedures are fair and reasonable to all the parties involved. It is not therefore possible for the complainant to remain anonymous.

If you wish to raise alleged breach(es) of the Code of Professional Practise and Ethics, in the first instance, you should raise the issue with the Trichologist using their complaints procedure. If you are not satisfied with how your complaint was dealt with, you have the right to notify the IOT, by completing the online complaint form, explaining how you believe the IOT registered Trichologist has breached the Code and provide evidence to support your allegations.

If you have read the information above and would like to make your complaint, please complete our online form.

HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT

This section provides information on how to complain about an IOT registered Trichologist. Please note, we can only look into alleged breaches of the Code by registrants of the IOT who were in current registration at the time the breach occurred. If unsure of the registration status of the Trichologist you want to complain about, you can check on our search function on the "find a trichologist page" on our website.

If you are concerned that someone may be falsely calling themselves an IOT Trichologist or may be misrepresenting their membership or level of qualification , please contact us via email

at admin@trichologists.org.uk or telephone 020 4532 6465, and a member of the team will be happy to assist you.

We advise you to read the following sections in full, before making a complaint, to help you determine whether the Registration Council can deal with your concern(s).

WHAT COMPLAINTS CAN THE REGISTRATION COUNCIL DEAL WITH?

- Treatment, care or advice given by an IOT Trichologist
- Any aspect of the professional or personal behaviour of an IOT Trichologist
- The physical or mental health of an IOT Trichologist

COMPLAINTS THE REGISTRATION COUNCIL CANNOT DEAL WITH

- Complaints against clinics or companies - this is because the IOT regulate individual people, who are registered IOT Trichologists
- Refund of fees/payment matters
- Compensation requests

WHO CAN COMPLAIN?

Anyone can make a complaint or raise a concern about an IOT registered Trichologist. This includes patients, their families, members of the public and other healthcare professionals, including fellow Trichologists.

RECORDING A CONSULTATION

Patients don't necessarily need permission to record a consultation as the information is personal to them and therefore exempt from data protection laws. The content of the recording is confidential to the patient, not the Trichologist, and even a covert recording is not therefore a breach of confidentiality. Similarly, where a recording is made entirely for personal reasons it is unlikely to engage the UK GDPR or Data Protection Act 2018.

However, the Trichologist does have a reasonable expectation of privacy during a consultation. Patients should therefore seek and record (audibly or by written consent) the Trichologist's agreement to make a recording. In addition to legal questions, it is a matter of courtesy and respect, and is more likely to lead to a positive and trusting relationship. The Trichologist's common law privacy rights are likely to be engaged where patients make audio or visual recordings without obtaining the Trichologist's consent. Recordings of consultations without a recording (audibly or written) of the Trichologist consent may not be admissible if a concern is raised against them.

HOW SHOULD I COMPLAIN?

All IOT-registered Trichologists must have a Customer Complaints Procedure in place within their practice and must handle complaints promptly and fairly. If you wish to make a complaint, you should first contact the Trichologist directly and clearly state that you are raising an official

complaint, and if you are not satisfied with the outcome, you may contact the regulatory body (the Institute of Trichologists). The Trichologist should then be given the opportunity to respond and address your concerns through their complaints procedure. If you remain dissatisfied with how your complaint has been handled, you may then notify the Institute of Trichologists (IOT).

COMPENSATION OR REFUND OF FEES

All IOT Trichologists must have insurance to cover claims made against them and will provide details if you ask them. For more information about compensation or a refund of costs you could contact a solicitor or Citizens Advice.

COMPLAINTS THAT DO NOT RELATE TO FITNESS TO PRACTISE

We will not usually investigate allegations of the following matters. This is because legally they are not complaints of unprofessional conduct or professional incompetence. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

- Complaints about a Trichologist who is not a registrant of the IOT at the time of the alleged breach,
- Events that took place more than twelve months ago, unless in exceptional circumstances
- Complaints about products or services
- Complaints about a Registrant who has committed a criminal offence, such complaints should be made to the Police. The IOT make take forward an allegation of misconduct based on the fact of conviction
- Allegations of professional negligence, contractual matters and matters that should be addressed through personal or commercial indemnity claims
- Complaints solely about a company or its policies or business operations
- Complaints solely about employment, contracts or business premises of a company,
- Complaints brought solely to remedy a private grievance which does not raise issues of public protection, patients' safety or the reputation of the profession.
- Vexatious complaints (a complaint that is entirely without merit and is made with the intention of causing inconvenience, harassment or expense to the IOT trichologist)
- Complaints which solely relate to a registrant's personal life unless the complaint: has the potential to bring the profession into disrepute; could potentially affect public confidence in the profession; relates to a conviction in the United Kingdom for a criminal offence; relates to a physical or mental condition which seriously impairs a registrant's ability to practise as an IOT trichologists; or raises issues of public protection or patient safety
- Minor or single complaints about note taking or record keeping unless there is evidence of "incompetence or negligence to a high degree"

- Complaints which lie solely within the jurisdiction of another regulator and which should have been made to that regulator
- Complaints which amount to a difference of professional opinion and do not raise issues of public protection or patient safety.
- Behaviour that falls outside of the Code.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Complaints will be dealt with in a confidential manner. Everyone involved in the procedures for investigating and managing the complaint through the IOT's processes has a duty to maintain confidentiality. For a complaint to be investigated fully and action taken it will be necessary to disclose the complainant's identity to the person or responsible party within the IOT's department/service which is the subject of the complaint and to others directly involved. Where something is disclosed that could have a safeguarding impact we reserve the right to liaise with appropriate professionals.

Any confidential third-party evidence submitted must be accompanied by written permission from the person named in the documentation. Examples of this might include medical documentation submitted on behalf of someone other than yourself.

HOW LONG WILL THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS TAKE?

This will depend on the details of the complaint. We aim to investigate complaints in as short a time as possible. If you need more information about the complaint process or if you are unable to complete the complaints form, or require assistance to do so, please contact us via email at admin@trichologists.org.uk or telephone 020 4532 6465 and a member of the team will be happy to assist you.

THE INVESTIGATION PROCESS

This section explains what happens once a complaint has been made and describes the investigation process in more detail.

COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION TIMEFRAMES, THE IOT WILL:

All timeframes run from the date the concern or allegation is formally received by the Council, unless otherwise stated.

1. **Acknowledgement of Receipt**
   -The Council will acknowledge receipt of the concern to the referrer/complainant and notify the registrant within 7 working days

2. **Initial Assessment**
   -An initial review to determine whether the allegation, if proven, could amount to impairment of fitness to practise.
   -This stage will normally be completed within 28 calendar days.
   -Possible outcomes: close the case with no further action, issue advice, or proceed to full investigation.

3. **Full Investigation by Investigation Committee**
   - Gathering of evidence, obtaining witness statements, expert reports (if required), and seeking representations from the registrant.
   -The investigation will normally be completed within 6 months.
   -In complex cases (e.g., multiple allegations, large volumes of evidence, or need for specialist input), this may be extended, with updates provided every 3 months.

4. **Investigation Committee Review**
   -Following completion of the investigation, a decision on whether the case should proceed to a hearing, be closed, result in a warning, or be resolved by consensual disposal (undertakings or conditions).
   This decision will normally be made within 3 months of the investigation file being finalised.

5. **Referral to Fitness to Practise Hearing (if required)**
   -If the case is referred, a hearing will normally be scheduled within 3-6 months of the referral decision.
   -Overall target: from receipt of concern to final hearing outcome within 7 months where possible.

ADDITIONAL PROVISIONS

Progress Updates
The registrant and complainant (where applicable) will receive written updates on progress at least every 3 months during the investigation stage, or sooner if significant developments occur.

Extensions and Pauses
Timeframes may be extended or paused where necessary (e.g., awaiting outcome of criminal proceedings, police investigation, or coroner's inquest; registrant's ill health; or exceptional complexity). Any extension will be notified in writing with clear reasons and a revised expected timescale.

Interim Orders
Where public protection requires it, an application for an interim order may be considered at any stage, typically within 2 weeks of identifying a potential risk.

These timeframes align with principles of proportionality, transparency, and public protection, ensuring cases are resolved as expeditiously as possible without compromising fairness.

AS PART OF THE PANEL INVESTIGATION, WE WILL:

- Write to the Trichologist to tell them about the complaint. We must give them a copy of your complaint (and any other relevant documents) so that they know the full details. If you are worried about this, please tell us.

- If the Trichologist provides a response to your complaint, we will send you a copy, so that you can comment if you would like to. If you provide any comments, we will give a copy of your comments to the Trichologist.

- If relevant to your complaint, we may ask to see information about your health condition or copies of medical reports. (We will seek your permission and agreement for this information. We will treat with the strictest confidentially, in accordance with the IOT's GDPR policy. It will not be shared with the Trichologist or anyone outside of the RC Panel and will be destroyed immediately after the investigation.

- We may invite you to make a statement of evidence (statement). If you agree we will normally arrange for a member of the Investigation Panel will telephone you to go over the details of your complaint and draft the statement.

- If you prefer not to make a statement, that will not be a problem. The Investigation Committee will rely on your complaint documentation and your complaint will be investigated in the normal way.

Sometimes, in serious cases where there appears to be an immediate risk to the public, the Investigation Committee may ask for a Trichologist to be suspended from seeing patients while a complaint is being considered. In these circumstances a special meeting between the Investigation Committee representative and the Registration Council to decide whether to impose an interim suspension of the Trichologist's registration pending a full investigation.

The investigating panel will carefully consider the complaint, all the statements and supporting documents and evidence before deciding whether a breach there has been a breach of the Code. In coming to a decision, the Panel may decide to meet with the complainant; this will be decided on a case-by-case basis. The meeting will allow you to explain the details of your complaint and to answer any questions it may have. You will be asked about any support or reasonable adjustment you might need to fully participate in the meeting.

The meeting will be held at your convenience and will either be in-person or virtually. You will be given the opportunity to present any information relevant to your case that you want the investigating panel to consider. If you have a witness that can give evidence to support your allegation you should pass on the meeting invitation and arrange for them to attend.

Alternatively, you are allowed to bring a friend or family member with you. Your companion can support you in the meeting and help you to present your case, but they cannot answer questions on your behalf or interfere with the course of the meeting nr act in a legal capacity. Notes will be made of the meeting, and you will be given a copy of the notes along with a written outcome of the investigation.

If you do not wish to attend either a virtual or in-person meeting this will not affect the investigation; alternatively, we will offer you other options to collect the relevant information, such as a phone call to record your statement.

THE INVESTIGATING COMMITTEE (IC)

The IOT Investigation Committee is responsible for ensuring that complaints alleging professional misconduct, incompetence, or incapacity by a registrant are handled in a manner that is fair, impartial, thorough, proportionate, timely, and consistent with the principles of

natural justice and procedural fairness. The IC acts as an impartial body tasked with reviewing complaints or allegations to determine whether there is sufficient evidence of impaired fitness to practise warranting further action, such as referral to an FtP hearing. The Committee adheres to the following criteria and procedures in all investigations.

PURPOSE OF THE INVESTIGATING COMMITTEE

The IC serves as a gatekeeper in the regulatory complaints process, ensuring that only cases with sufficient evidence and public interest implications proceed to a formal FtP hearing. Its primary objectives are:

- To protect the public by identifying cases where a professional's conduct, competence, or health may pose a risk.
- To ensure fairness by thoroughly and impartially reviewing allegations before escalating them.
- To filter out complaints that lack merit, are frivolous, or do not meet the threshold for FtP concerns.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES:

Initial Review of Complaints

- Receive and assess complaints or referrals from the IOT's complaints team, which may originate from the public, employers, colleagues, or other sources.
- Determine whether the complaint falls within the IOT jurisdiction and relates to fitness to practise (e.g., misconduct, poor performance, health issues, or criminal convictions).

Evidence Gathering and Analysis

- Review all relevant evidence, such as written complaints, witness statements, professional records, and any prior disciplinary history.
- The IC may request additional information or clarification from complainants, the registrant, or third parties (e.g., employers, medical professionals).
- In some cases, the IC may commission independent expert reports (e.g., clinical or technical assessments) to evaluate the allegations.

Confidentiality and Privacy

- All information obtained during the investigation will be treated as confidential, disclosed only as necessary for the regulatory process.
- Personal health information and other sensitive data shall be handled in strict confidence.

Decision-Making:

- The IC must assess whether there is a realistic prospect of proving the allegations (often referred to as the "real prospect test" or similar threshold.
- The IC must determine whether the allegations, if proven, could indicate impaired fitness to practise, meaning the registrant's ability to practise safely and effectively is compromised.
- Decisions are based solely on the evidence gathered and all will be supported by clear, written reasons

- The IC will decide on one of the following outcomes:
    - Dismissal of the complaint and decide that there is no further action and close the case if the allegations are unfounded, lack evidence, or do not meet the threshold for impairment.
    - Referral to a 'fitness to practise' hearing panel for formal proceedings
    - In all cases, written reasons for the decision shall be provided to both the registrant and the complainant, subject to statutory requirements.

INTERIM MEASURES:

If the IC finds that there is an immediate risk to public safety pending further investigation or a hearing. The IC can impose an Interim Order on a Trichologists practise.

The IC can impose an Interim Order on a Trichologists practice whilst an investigation takes place and prior to a referral to a Fitness to Practise full hearing takes place.

These orders are used when there is evidence suggesting an immediate risk that justifies restricting practice on a temporary basis to protect the public pending the outcome of the full investigation and hearing.

Interim orders are not a finding of fact or a sanction; they are precautionary measures imposed on the balance of probabilities that a risk exists.

The IOT may impose one of the following interim orders:

1. **Interim Suspension Order**
   The registrant is prohibited from practising in any capacity during the period of the order.
2. **Interim Conditions of Practice Order**
   The registrant may continue to practise but only subject to specified conditions. Conditions must be practicable, measurable, verifiable, and appropriate to address the identified risk.
   Examples of common conditions include:
    - Direct supervision of all or specific aspects of practice
    - Restriction to certain types or areas of practice
    - Requirement to undergo additional training, retraining, or assessment
    - Prohibition on working in certain settings (e.g., lone working or with vulnerable clients)
    - Regular reporting to a designated supervisor or to the regulator

CRITERIA AND REASONS FOR IMPOSING AN INTERIM ORDER

An interim order may only be imposed if the Interim Orders Panel is satisfied, on the available evidence, that it is necessary for one or more of the following reasons:

1. **Protection of the public**
   There is a real risk to service users, patients, clients, or others if the registrant continues to practise without restriction while allegations are investigated.

2. **Public interest**
   It is necessary to maintain public confidence in the profession or the regulatory process. This may arise where unrestricted practice would seriously undermine trust in the profession, even if no immediate risk to individuals has been identified.
3. **In the Registered Trichologists own interests**
   In rare cases, continuation of practice without restriction would be detrimental to the health or well-being of the registrant.

The panel must also be satisfied that imposing an interim order is proportionate, meaning that a lesser measure (such as conditions rather than suspension) would not adequately address the risk, and that doing nothing is not an acceptable option.

KEY PRINCIPLES APPLIED BY THE PANEL

- The decision is based on risk assessment, not on determining the truth of the allegations.
- The threshold is lower than at a full hearing (balance of probabilities that a risk exists requiring interim measures).
- The order must be the least restrictive measure capable of addressing the identified risk.
- The Trichologist is given notice of the interim order hearing and the opportunity to make representations (in writing and/or orally).

DOCUMENTATION AND REPORTING:

- The IC will prepare clear, reasoned decisions explaining the rationale for referral, closure, or other actions.
- They will ensure decisions are communicated to the complainant, registrant, and relevant stakeholders in accordance with the IOT policies.
- The IC will maintain detailed records to ensure transparency and accountability.

ENSURING PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS:

- The IC must adhere to fairness principles, such as giving the registrant an opportunity to respond to allegations.
- The IC must ensure that all decisions are impartial, evidence-based, and free from bias or conflicts of interest.

WHAT IS FITNESS TO PRACTISE?

Being fit to practise means that an IOT Trichologist must have the skills, knowledge, health and character to do their job safely and effectively. The Code sets out the professional standards that Trichologists must uphold in order to be IOT registered to practise in the UK.

FITNESS TO PRACTISE COMMITTEE – DECISION MAKING

IMPAIRMENT

What is impairment?

Impairment is assessed at the date of the decision and concerns whether the registrant is currently fit to practise without restriction. A finding that something went wrong in the past is not, by itself, sufficient. The panel must consider the established concern and whether it relates to conduct, competence, health or character. These may include any:

- continuing risk
- the registrant's insight and remediation
- the likelihood of repetition,
- the seriousness and context of the concern, and the need to uphold professional standards and public confidence.
- Fitness to practise proceedings are protective, not punitive.

Determining whether someone is fit to practise requires consideration of whether the proved charges fall within one of these types of concern and indicate a continuing risk to public safety, public confidence in the profession, or professional standards.

BASES FOR A FINDING OF IMPAIRMENT

Public safety

The panel must assess whether the registrant presents a current risk of harm to patients, service users or the wider public. Relevant considerations may include the nature and gravity of the proved facts; whether the conduct was isolated, repeated or part of a pattern; the likelihood and potential consequences of repetition; the registrant's level of insight; remediation undertaken and evidence of its effectiveness; compliance with any relevant restrictions; and the extent to which any remaining risk can be managed. The weight given to each factor will depend on the circumstances of the case.

Public confidence and proper professional standards

Impairment may be found on public-interest grounds even where the risk of repetition or direct harm is low. Such a finding may be required where, because of the nature and seriousness of the proved conduct, failing to find impairment would undermine public confidence in the profession or fail to declare and uphold proper professional standards. The assessment must be objective and informed by the purpose of professional regulation; it must not be based on presumed public opinion, media reaction or a desire to protect the profession's reputation. Relevant considerations include the seriousness of the departure from expected standards, any abuse of trust or position, dishonesty, concealment, persistence, harm or potential harm, and whether the regulatory response demonstrates that the conduct is being treated with appropriate seriousness.

Reasons for the impairment decision

The written determination must explain the decision on current impairment in a clear and structured way. It should identify the proved facts and statutory ground relied upon; distinguish the personal component from the public component of impairment; address the evidence and submissions that materially affected the outcome; evaluate current risk, insight, remediation and likelihood of repetition where relevant; explain any finding concerning public confidence or professional standards; and state why the conclusion is necessary and proportionate. Where impairment is not found despite serious past conduct, the reasons should explain why the evidence at the hearing is sufficient to address both public safety and the wider public interest. The reasons must not rely on matters that were not proved or admitted and must keep the impairment decision separate from any subsequent decision on sanction.

GUIDANCE FOR REGISTRANTS

This section provides more information about formal hearings of the IOT Registration Council.

Registrants may consult with the IOT policy and procedure documents to be informed about what will happen if a complaint is made against them. This is not a substitute for legal advice. The IOT cannot give legal advice or tell Registrants how to respond to a complaint, however, where necessary the RC may appoint a fellow IOT Registrant, who is unconnected to the case to provide support to you, they may also accompany you to any meetings.

Registrants should contact their professional indemnity insurer immediately if informed that a complaint has been made about their conduct or practise.

CONDUCT HEARINGS

ABOUT HEARINGS

As part of our duty to protect the public we hold hearings into cases about IOT Trichology professionals. A Fitness to Practise (FTP) Hearing (link) is a formal proceeding where an Independent Panel, consisting of a three-person panel, one of whom is a registrant trichologist (RIT) an Independent Chair and a lay panel member. In some cases, the three-person panel may be members from the existing RC.

Independent Case Presenter

In all cases that are referred to the (FTP) hearing, The IOT will be appoint **an Independent Case Presenter (ICP)** to present the case against the registrant. The ICP is a legally qualified, neutral advocate fair, impartial, and objective. They balance advocacy with neutrality to uphold public protection and fairness to the registrant.

The Trichologist will also be expected and encouraged to have a legal representation or an advocate such as a union representation to represent them and put their case before the panel in response to the allegations and defend their case.

During a hearing, the RC Panel will listen to all the evidence from both the complainant and the (RIT) to decide whether the trichologist practise and conduct fell short of the professional

standard and whether the IOT Code of Professional Practise and Ethics has been breached. If the Registered Trichologist is considered to be impaired then then the (FTP) Panel will go on to consider and impose a sanction per IOT Sanctions Guidance (link) . The purpose of a sanction is not to punish the Trichologist but to correct unsatisfactory practise and/or to protect the public.

If a Trichologist is found to be of 'unacceptable professional conduct' or 'professional incompetence' the council can issue one or more sanctions:

- Written warning - which acts as a caution to the Trichologist that their practise has fallen below the acceptable standards and sets remedial actions the Trichologist should undertake within a specified amount of time. Once the corrective action has been satisfactorily undertaken and evidenced, the written warning will be removed from the Trichologist's record and will not appear in future reports or searches.

- Conditions of Practise Order – This places a restriction, or puts conditions, on the Trichologist's practise (for example, that the Trichologist works under supervision or has further training until such time as they have demonstrated they have reached safe levels of practise). There may also be a requirement to return to a RC panel for review.

- Suspension order - suspend the Trichologist's registration for a period of time, to be determined by the panel. This is can be while a further investigation is being carried out.

- Removal from the Register - The Trichologist is permanently removed from the register, followed the outcome of an investigation.

If a Trichologist is currently subject to a sanction, it will appear on any search for their name on the IOT register.

The sanctions available are:

- **Take no further action** – There is a discretion to take no further action in some rare cases and full explanation must be given
- **Written warning** – Caution the Trichologist with a formal written warning which will remain on file a period of time, to be determined by the panel.
- **Conditions of Practice Order** – place a restriction, or conditions, on the Trichologist's registration (for example, that the Trichologist works under supervision or has further training). There may also be a requirement to return to panel for review.
- **Suspension order** – suspend the Trichologist's registration for a period of time, to be determined by the panel.
- **Removal from the Register** – The Trichologist's name is removed from the register permanently.

If a Trichologist is currently subject to a sanction, it will appear on any search for their name on the IOT register.

APPEALS

If a Registered Trichologist is dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint made against them or the way it has been handled, they have the right to appeal the decision.

Appeals must be submitted in writing within 28 days of receiving the formal response to your complaint.

At the hearing, the IOT case presenter will assume all responsibility for investigating and prosecuting the appeal on behalf of the registrant with the complainant appearing as a witness. The appeals process is governed by the IOT's separate Appeals Policy and Restoration Policy which sets out full details of the grounds for appeal, the procedure, timelines, and the composition of the Appeals Panel.

Please note that an appeal is not a complete re-hearing of the original complaint, but a review to determine whether the original decision was reasonable and fair based on the evidence presented.

DISCLAIMER: While the IOT is actively seeking to gain **protected professional status** for the title "Trichologist" in the UK, registration with the Institute of Trichologists (IOT) is **not currently required by law** in order to use the title "Trichologist". The IOT is committed to upholding the **highest professional and ethical standards** among its **registrants** and to maintaining a robust, accredited register of qualified Trichologists. Please note that the IOT **cannot regulate** or **take responsibility for individuals who are not registered** with the IOT.