

Department of Health: Refreshing the mandate for Health Education England

Response by the Wellcome Trust

September 2013

Key Points

- Research and innovation are vital to ensure that the delivery of services in the future is effective, efficient and evidence-based. The mandate for Health Education England should be strengthened to reflect this.
- The mandate currently reflects the vital role of the whole workforce in supporting innovation, but lacks an equivalent objective on research. This imbalance should be rectified.
- A key priority for Health Education England must be to ensure that there is sufficient flexibility to enable clinicians to devote time to high quality research training and to help post-graduate deaneries and employers to create a supportive environment for their staff to undertake research.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Wellcome Trust is pleased to have an opportunity to contribute to the Department of Health's review of the mandate for Health Education England (HEE) for April 2013 to March 2015. As a major provider of research fellowships for clinicians at PhD and postdoctoral level, our response focuses on the importance of education and training of the workforce to support research and innovation.
2. We warmly welcome the focus on "a flexible workforce receptive to research and innovation" in the April 2013 mandate and in HEE's Education Outcomes Framework. However, the mandate should be strengthened in this area to reflect the fact that research is fundamental to deliver a health service that is effective, efficient and evidence-based. Research and innovation enable services to keep pace with a changing environment and must therefore be considered as priorities when considering the requirements for the future health service.

DEVELOPING A RESEARCH AWARE WORKFORCE

3. The pace of technological and scientific developments means that it is more important than ever to ensure that the clinical workforce contains significant numbers of fully trained researchers. It is also important that the wider clinical workforce is sufficiently research aware to build the capacity of the NHS to apply research findings and contribute to research and the spread of innovation. The NHS Chief Executive's Review, *Innovation: Health and Wealth* said that "innovation is

central to the future of the NHS” and recognised the importance of the workforce in realising this ambition. We agree and consider that an appropriately trained workforce will be essential to deliver the duties towards research and innovation in the Health and Social Care Act (2012) and the commitment in the NHS Constitution “to the promotion, conduct and use of research to improve the current and future health and care of the population”.

4. In order to deliver the full benefits of research and innovation, it is essential that healthcare professionals are given the education, training, time and resources needed to support research and innovation, and the mandate must fully reflect this.
5. The mandate currently recognises the vital role of the workforce in supporting innovation. Currently objective 6.2.6 requires HEE to “work with LETBs to develop education strategies to ensure future professional staff are more technologically literate and able to promote the adoption and spread of new technologies and innovation”. However, the mandate lacks an equivalent objective to ensure that future professional staff are able to contribute to the delivery of research and in the application of research findings. We recommend that an objective focused on research should be included to mirror the ambition in objective 6.2.6.
6. Objective 6.3.2, “contribute to improving the proportion of staff who consider that they can suggest improvements and drive them through”, is currently vague and appears to partly duplicate objective 6.2.6. Objective 6.3.2 could therefore be refocused to take into account the need for HEE to support the development of a research-trained workforce.

SUPPORTING CLINICAL ACADEMIC CAREERS

7. In addition to developing a workforce that is research aware, an important priority for HEE must be to ensure that the training system supports the development of clinical academics. This will ensure that England is in a position to develop a cadre of the highest calibre people. We therefore welcome objective 6.3.1 “to support clinical academic careers for health professionals and increase numbers of staff accessing academic careers programmes across all clinical and public health professions... [including] working with medical schools to explore opportunities for students to intercalate BScs as part of their education.”
8. We consider that this objective could be strengthened to reflect the need for greater flexibility in clinical training pathways to develop the clinical academic workforce. HEE and its Local Education and Training Boards (LETBs) need to work in partnership with post-graduate deaneries, employers and funders to introduce greater flexibility in the training pathway to enable trainees to balance their need for clinical training with research opportunities. For example, for clinical trainees interested in pursuing an academic career, it is vital that the pathway facilitates periods of research training – for example taking a PhD – and enables doctors to balance their postdoctoral research and clinical work. There must also be sufficient geographical flexibility in clinical posts to ensure that trainees can conduct their research in strong academic centres. A key aim for HEE must be to ensure that the system enables clinicians to devote time to high quality research training and to help

post-graduate deaneries and employers to create a supportive environment for their staff to undertake research.

BUILDING CAPACITY IN GENOMICS

9. We warmly welcome objective 6.2.8 to “work with partners to develop a strategy for training and continuous professional development in genomics and genomic technology.” The Wellcome Trust has invested substantially in genetics and genomics research over the last two decades and we continue to support this research at scale in the UK. The greater specificity provided by genomic medicine will lead to a transformation in diagnosis and therapy. This is already starting to happen in areas such as cancer and in understanding the spread of infectious diseases. Training and education of the workforce will be needed to ensure that the NHS is in a position to deliver the opportunities offered by genomics, as this becomes increasingly relevant to other branches of medicine.

EXPERT ADVICE

10. To underpin HEE’s important role in research and innovation it is crucial that there is strong academic representation in its advisory structures, and that this advice is appropriately prioritised at the highest levels of HEE. We look forward to seeing how the Healthcare Science Advisory Group will develop and how research and innovation will be represented on the new Multi-Professional Advisory Body.
11. We note that the report of the Shape of Training review is due to be published in the autumn. We therefore hope that the refresh of the mandate will take this report into account to allow HEE to respond appropriately to the recommendations.

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