

Department of Health: Liberating the NHS: Developing the Healthcare Workforce**Response by the Wellcome Trust**

March 2011

Introduction

1. The Wellcome Trust is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to this consultation. Given the Trust's remit our comments focus on how the proposals will impact on research in the NHS and the education and training of the academic healthcare workforce. We have worked with the Academy of Medical Sciences in developing this response and support the findings of their working group response to this consultation¹.
2. Our response highlights:
 - that the proposals will not be sufficient to encourage a culture of research in the NHS workforce;
 - the necessity of national oversight in healthcare education and training to ensure quality and excellence; and
 - the importance of universities in the planning and provision of education.
3. Research scientists in the healthcare workforce are a unique and important group within the NHS workforce and are crucial to realising the vision of the UK as a leader in medical research and innovation^{2,3}. The Trust welcomes the acknowledgement of the importance of research in 'Liberating the NHS: Developing the Healthcare Workforce', however it is not clear how the implementation of these proposals will impact on research and the careers of healthcare scientists. We are disappointed that the education and training of the academic healthcare workforce is not specifically discussed.
4. The proposals lack clarity and are complicated. Although education and training in the NHS can be improved, we are concerned that the proposals imply there are generic problems across the current system. We believe that the proposals should build upon current success, and that the implementation of reforms must allow sufficient time for piloting and evaluation and provide a robust plan for the transition period.

Embedding research in the NHS

5. One of the goals of educating and training the healthcare workforce, as set out on page six of the consultation, is to produce and retain quality professionals that can promote the development of future healthcare benefits. The education and training of the healthcare

¹ Mark Walport, Director of the Wellcome Trust, chaired the working group that developed the Academy's response

² Modernising Scientific Careers: The UK Way Forward

http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/@ps/documents/digitalasset/dh_113990.pdf

³ Developing the best research professionals 2007 chaired by Professor Janet Finch

<http://www.ukcrc.org/publications/reports/>

workforce plays a key role in embedding a research culture throughout the NHS⁴, which is important to provide a supportive environment for innovation. This in turn will enhance the UK's global competitiveness in the health and life sciences. The education and training of healthcare professionals needs to equip them with the skills necessary to deliver translation of research into health benefits.

6. Furthermore, it is essential that a new system should have the appropriate structure and resources to support research across *all* professions within the healthcare workforce and throughout their careers.
7. Clinical academics have a crucial role in leading research within the NHS and contributing to development of research skills in the wider healthcare workforce through mentoring and promoting a facilitative environment. We therefore welcome the emphasis on both a role for clinicians as leaders in the NHS and the professional ownership of education. However, there is a lack of clarity and detail on how these specific proposals will be implemented.

Education and training

8. The proposals do not distinguish between basic medical education and the training of professionals in the work environment. The proposals should recognise these differences and the distinct requirements of education and training. While we consider that aspects of training can be developed successfully at a local level, education of the future healthcare workforce requires national oversight, quality assurance and standardisation.
9. The education and training pathway of healthcare professionals requires flexibility. For example, academic clinicians may need breaks from clinical service while they undertake research, or to undertake stints of clinical practice abroad. Without a well-structured career pathway that allows for professional mobility, clinicians and other healthcare professionals may be discouraged from pursuing research or career development outside the UK.
10. The proposals do not clearly describe how undergraduate and postgraduate medical education and training will be funded. Considering the current pressures to deliver cost savings, we are concerned that funds may be diverted away from medical education and clinical research training. Appropriate provision of resources is required to support clinical academics at all stages of their career development and resource allocation should be consistent with national strategic priorities.

Health Education England and Local Skills Networks

11. We are concerned that providing training via local skills networks will lead to a fragmented and inconsistent education across the healthcare workforce. A system of local skills networks governed by market forces poses particular difficulties in ensuring supply of a well-trained academic workforce since research is unlikely to bring immediate benefits to healthcare provision and may therefore be undervalued in the system.
12. The Trust has concerns that the broad remit of Health Education England (HEE) will make it difficult for the organisation to take into account and respond to the full range of requirements across the entire healthcare workforce. Given the Trust's remit we have concerns about how the medical research community will be represented in the proposed system. The body that oversees education and training of the healthcare workforce will need to be fit for purpose; understand both the overlapping and distinct issues across the entire workforce; and be responsive to a changing environment. HEE will need to coordinate and liaise with the Medical Royal Colleges, and other relevant stakeholders, to ensure the quality of education provision.

⁴ A new pathway for regulation and governance of health research
<http://www.acmedsci.ac.uk/index.php?pid=47&prid=88>

13. Furthermore, no information is provided on how the key relationship between HEE and the skills networks will be coordinated. The skills networks will be well placed to perform an advisory role to inform HEE of local workforce needs, but all commissioning for education and training cannot be decided on a local basis because national oversight is essential. The multi-disciplinary and national perspective provided by HEE, should mean that this body is responsible for the majority of education and training commissioning, while skills networks would be well placed to be responsible for commissioning on-the-job training in response to local needs.

A vital role for universities

14. A high quality of education and training must be ensured at every level and across professions in the healthcare workforce. Since universities play a key role in this by providing quality assurance and continuity over the career pathway, the Trust is particularly concerned that the role of medical schools and universities in providing medical education is not defined within the proposed devolved framework. We would encourage close partnerships between universities and NHS Trusts to be responsible for the provision of healthcare and training.
15. We would like to highlight the success of the Academic Health Science Centres (AHSC), as well as the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) Integrated Academic Training Pathway and NIHR Trainees Coordinating Centre. It is important that academic training is integrated with clinical training, to promote innovation and the translation of research into improved healthcare provision. These initiatives, as well as the Health Innovation and Education Clusters (HIEC), demonstrate that the national coordination of the NIHR has encouraged successful integration of education, research and clinical training. The new system should learn lessons in education and training provision from these centres and build upon their success.
16. An important role for universities, within the context of the proposed skills networks, will be to maintain and safeguard the distinctions between education and service delivery, as well as between medical and non-medical education.

Summary

17. We suggest that these reforms present an opportunity to build upon the UK's current world-class education for healthcare professionals. A well-trained workforce, educated to a high standard, not only provides excellent and efficient service provision, but will increase the productivity of the NHS. Furthermore, high quality education will retain the UK's international competitiveness to attract the best students and trainees, that will provide both immediate and long term economic benefit.

The Wellcome Trust is a global charitable foundation dedicated to achieving extraordinary improvements in human and animal health. We support the brightest minds in biomedical research and the medical humanities. Our breadth of support includes public engagement, education and the application of research to improve health. We are independent of both political and commercial interests.