

# A Health Service of all the talents: developing the NHS workforce

## Response to consultation

1. The Academy was established in 1998 *to promote the application of research to the practice of medicine and to the advancement of human health and welfare*. Our response reflects our views on the effects that these proposals may have on the future development of the medical sciences which are essential for a modern health service. We note that the proposals relate only to England.
2. We welcome the concept of an integrated approach to workforce development and support the establishment of a National Workforce Development Board with local implementation.
3. The consultation document acknowledges the importance for both education and research of strengthening the links with the universities. In welcoming this acknowledgement, we believe that there must therefore be a firm commitment to ensure that the academic perspective is considered at both national and local levels. Such an approach would allow the universities to appreciate the NHS requirements and respond more rapidly to changing circumstances than sometimes appears to be the case at present. As importantly, it would help the NHS to anticipate likely clinical developments as they emerge from research programmes, enabling workforce planning to be informed by R&D more directly than is currently possible. In this way, the NHS will be able to recruit and retain the type of motivated, flexible and skilled workforce the document envisages.
4. The Academy notes that there will be two stages to the implementation of the major changes that would follow in workforce planning, if the recommendations of this important consultation document are accepted. The first will be the development of the proposed new structures for workforce planning: the second will be their actual operation. The consultation document rightly notes the danger of inadvertent harm to undergraduate medical and dental education (paragraph 5.8). The Academy believes that there is a similar danger of inadvertent harm to academic career structures if appropriate safeguards are not put in place. In light of these dangers, the Academy of Medical Sciences strongly recommends that there should be academic input into all of the stages of the implementation of these radical changes in workforce planning.
5. The proposals would, moreover, be further strengthened by a commitment to ensure that the workforce at national and local levels had appropriate expertise in research. For most, that will entail an awareness of the potential advantages and disadvantages of research; for a small but important minority, high quality research training will be necessary.
6. Chapter 4 contains a number of references to current difficulties. Paragraph 4.11 refers, for example, to "the lack of a consistent effort to build research and development findings into thinking about the future workforce" and "the potential impact of genetic research on healthcare provision". The difficulties in recruiting and retaining academic staff outlined in Paragraph 4.20, apply also to the non-medically qualified scientists working in and for the NHS.
7. Unfortunately, neither the Executive Summary nor Chapter 5 *What is to be*

*done?* proposes solutions to these problems nor refers further to the need to develop an appropriate research capacity within the workforce. We appreciate that this is a difficult, crosscutting issue that inevitably involves a number of different government departments and other bodies. Such are the complexities of academic careers that providing appropriate research expertise for a modern health service will require co-operation from the universities, DfEE, HEFCE, OST, MRC and AMRC as well as a clear lead from the Department of Health. This Academy is well placed to produce a co-ordinated response from the academic community.

8. We strongly support the emphasis on improving the educational opportunities for the workforce and the proposals to work closely with the universities. We believe, however, that an ability to understand and, when appropriate, implement research findings is an important part of that education for NHS staff.
9. The future Health Service, in our opinion, depends on high quality research. While it is likely that only a relatively small number of staff will be required to stimulate and undertake such research, their importance must not be underestimated. We believe that their needs should be explicitly recognised in the plans for developing the NHS workforce.
10. In conclusion, we support the general thrust of these proposals and hope that the need to retain an academic perspective will be clearly identified in the plans for developing the NHS workforce that follow this consultation exercise.