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Rt Hon Andrew Lansley
Secretary of State for Health
House of Commons
London
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Developing the healthcare workforce

The Academy of Medical Sciences welcomes the Government's ambition to provide the highest standards of education and training to every member of the healthcare workforce. We are, however, concerned that the arrangements currently being developed will fail to achieve this goal.

A clear vision of what these new arrangements are trying to achieve is imperative and form must then follow function. Appropriate governance mechanisms with clear lines of accountability and minimal conflicts of interest should be the cornerstone of the reformed system. We recognise the value of a model with Health Education England (HEE) at the centre, distributing funds between 10-12 local networks. The national leadership provided by HEE will be crucial to ensuring high quality planning, education and training. However, we have serious concerns regarding the proposals for local education and training boards (LETBs).

We understand that you are currently considering how LETBs will be established. It is essential that LETBs are properly constituted if they are to manage the local workforce effectively. The Academy is encouraged by the widespread acceptance that establishing a healthcare workforce that is fit for purpose requires close partnership between healthcare and education providers. The governance structures of LETBs must reflect this. The current plans imply that higher education institutions (HEIs) are subject to a conflict of interest, whereas healthcare service providers are not. We simply do not understand how such a conclusion could be drawn. Service providers on the board of a LETB will be asked to commission themselves to provide postgraduate training within their organisations. This represents a significant conflict of interest. We acknowledge that neither education nor service providers are truly independent and therefore conclude that the only option for an effective LETB is to have both represented on its board.

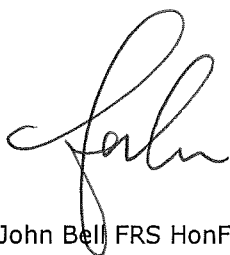
The conflict of interest of healthcare providers is compounded by the current proposals to establish the boards of LETBs with only executive members drawn from healthcare providers alone. The Academy strongly believes that the best model would be a mixed board with an independent Chair (as recommended by the Future Forum) and independent non-executive members who will support and challenge executive members drawn from both service and education providers. This model is already successfully implemented within Academic Health Science Centres (AHSCs) across the country. Establishing LETBs as currently proposed would in fact represent a backwards step from these strong relationships between academic institutions and service providers that are strengthening medical research in the UK and its translation into health benefits for patients.

We believe that the simplest way to establish LETBs would be a model in which HEE is the sole legal entity and LETBs are part of HEE itself. This would remove the need for further legislation to establish LETBs as separate legal entities. If for some reason this is not preferred model, we would express strong reservations about placing them within a Foundation Trust; this format will only act to further what is already a significant conflict of interest. We understand that two other options are currently under consideration. Regardless of which is selected, we would stress that establishing robust governance structures, as outlined above, is critical to ensuring that LETBs can develop and manage a local workforce that is equipped to deliver the very best care.

We share a mutual aim of maximising the current opportunity to improve workforce planning, education and training. We look forward to seeing the revised plans as they develop and would be pleased to provide further input. We can be contacted via Catherine Luckin at the Academy of Medical Sciences (Catherine.Luckin@acmedsci.ac.uk; 020 3176 2166).

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,



Sir John Bell FRS HonFREng PMedSci



Sir Mark Walport FRS FMedSci

Cc: Professor Steve Field
Ms Julie Moore

P.S. we raised this topic with you at the excellent meeting that we had with you earlier today when we presented the Council for Science and Technology report. This is important so we hope easy to fix !!