

Executive Director's Forward View – Annual Fellows' Meeting 2019

President, Council Members, Fellows, and guests, good afternoon. I am delighted to be speaking to you as the Academy's new Executive Director and to have the opportunity to spend a few moments looking ahead at how we will build on today's prestigious milestone in the Academy's influential history.

As you have heard, it has been a year of transition for the Academy and I would like first to pay tribute to my predecessor, Helen Munn. In my previous roles at the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) Helen was a much valued colleague and friend. I am all too well aware of the incredible legacy she leaves and, that she will be an extremely hard act to follow.

My thanks also go to our staff - Rachel Quinn, the leadership team and everyone who works for us. I am sure I do not need to tell you that, individually and collectively, they are widely admired as expert, approachable and highly effective. It is thanks to them - supported by the President, Officers and Council - that the Academy has been able to deliver another impressive portfolio of programs, grants, events and activities during the year.

It changed my career

Since my appointment, many people have asked me why I wanted to join the Academy.

- Is it our reputation for promoting excellence?
- Our role as the authoritative voice of medical science embodied by our Fellows?
- That we are seen as a unique and trusted source of independent, evidence-based expert advice?
- Our innovative public dialogue work?
- Or the free staff lunches?

It is all of the above of course. But most of all, it was the chance to lead an organisation which is so focused on people; in particular on supporting the next generation of world-leading medical scientists – inspiring scientists doing inspiring science - through our funding, our support and development opportunities at critical points in their careers. By making a difference to their careers I strongly believe we are also making a difference to the lives of patients, carers, the public and wider society, now and in the future.

Dr Helena Lee is one such clinical researcher - a children's eye doctor and scientist working in Southampton - who has benefited from Academy support, being both a grant awardee and having taken part in our innovative career development program for women - SUSTAIN. She has also taken part in our mentoring and media training schemes and was selected as a speaker in our first ever Ted-style event, AMS Live. Her experiences show how Academy support can make a real difference to early career researchers.

In her story - which you can read on our [website](#) - Helena talks movingly about one particular young girl whose sight has been affected by albinism and whose condition may be alleviated in the future because of her research. Work which the Academy has facilitated through its support. At a pivotal point in Helena's career two years ago - and finding it difficult to balance

work and family commitments - it was access to the Academy's support that has enabled her to pursue her research:

'Academy support was vital to me at this stage,' she says. 'Most importantly, speaking with the others on the programme reminded me why I love science and research. My mentors and the SUSTAIN programme gave me the confidence and skills that eventually led to a fellowship. I could not have done it without them, or without suffering a few failures along the way.'

I also got some sense of the difference the Academy is making to scientists' careers a few weeks ago when I joined over 80 of our Turnberg Fellowships in Cyprus for their second alumni conference. As you'll know, our Turnberg Travel Fellowships is our oldest international scheme and continues to be a pioneering one - promoting scientific interchange and international understanding between the UK, Israel and the Middle East. 270 Fellowships have been awarded since it began in 2008 and when I asked one of the participants from Jordan over coffee what it has meant to them she said: *'It changed my career. It changed my life.'* What could be a better example of the difference we are making and of diversity in action?

2020-2021

Looking ahead to 2020 I have no crystal ball, but I think it safe to assume that the early months will be taken up for us – no doubt for all of us! - with understanding the new political landscape; on working with the other Academies and our partners in ensuring a new Government and parliament is developing policies that reflect the interests and priorities of medical science.

We be publishing our report on NHS and academia early in the New Year as you will have heard, beginning our working party on chronobiology and holding FORUM events on healthy ageing, multi-morbidity, chronic pain and public involvement in research. Council has also this afternoon signed off on our future program of Global Challenges Research Fund workshops. This will be themed around the topic of 'Achieving Universal Health Coverage' with events in Argentina, Nigeria and Egypt as well as additional workshops in Thailand on antimicrobial resistance, in Peru on nutritional health in Peru and in Ethiopia on maternal and newborn health. Our international standing as an Academy has been brought home to me many times over the last month. Last month's Academy and The Lancet International Lecture by Peru's former Health Minister Professor Patty Garcia on corruption in global health attracted a record attendance including a live link with colleagues in Peru.

Grant schemes and programmes

Our current grant schemes and programmes are much in demand. Over the next year we'll be doing further rounds of SUSTAIN, as well as continuing to deliver our other career support programmes such as Future Leaders in Innovation, Enterprise and Research (FLIER) which has quite literally got off to a flying start with a second cohort beginning in New Year; our INSPIRE programme of small grants to support activities to inform and excite undergraduate medical, dental and veterinary students about the opportunities and potential of a career in research; our new AMS Professorships scheme and Springboard awards. We also hope that many of you will join us at our next scientific meeting which will be the Clinical Academics in Training Annual Conference (CATAC), in Bristol on Wednesday 6 May 2020.

The funding environment will no doubt be as challenging as ever. I look forward to strengthening our existing relationships with major funders but also to exploring new avenues for funding. Naturally we wish to grow existing schemes to meet increasing demand. But also to take forward new ideas. Such as our plans for a Transdisciplinary Fellowship scheme in the

Health of the Public and work that will emerge from our recent Task Force on mobility which will report shortly.

It will also be important that our staff know that we are committed to strengthening our lively and open organisational culture so that we can continue to recruit and retain talented and committed people throughout the organisation.

The Future

Looking further ahead, this is only week six of my time as Executive Director so, as you would expect, I am still very much in listening mode. I am looking forward to doing more of that during the course of the afternoon and our dinner this evening. Your thoughts on how we develop the Academy in the future will be very timely given that the coming year will also be when we begin to think about our strategic plan for 2021-2026.

This year we turned 21. We are now a young adult in age, but wiser beyond our years, thanks to you in this room. I am excited about the innovations that might emerge, but also the opportunity it will provide to focus on issues fundamental to our future growth and sustainability. Building on The President's comments I am particularly keen to examine how we can strengthen our work in the regions and with the devolved administrations, as well as diversify the partners we work with and in ways which are reflective of the many ways in which biomedical and health research is changing. Also how we can engage with more of our 1300 Fellows - it is remarkable the number of you I have met who have pleaded 'Please Use me more'; and how we can enable our early career researchers to network, come together and have a voice in what we do.

We are all passionate in this room about the Academy, what it stands for and what it does. I am sure, like me, you also feel it could and should have a higher profile not just with our immediate partners and colleagues, but more widely too. We are incredibly lucky to have such a talented and successful communications and engagement team who have made great strides in this direction in the last year with The Departure Lounge. It will be important in our communications and engagement activities not just to highlight what we stand for – excellence, independence, voice – but also to demonstrate how as a charity we serve the public interest, bringing science to citizens and citizens into science.

I am very much looking forward to working with you. Thank you for listening.