

Academy of Medical Royal Colleges

Academy Response to the Health Select Committee Report '*Modernising Medical Careers*'

The focus of this response is on Recommendation [33]:

that the Royal Colleges review the role of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and consider replacing it with an executive body which has the authority to make decisions on behalf of all the Colleges.

Introduction

1. The Academy welcomes the opportunity to respond to this Report of the Health Select Committee.
2. The Report gives a clear signal to the Department of Health that not only must it repair deficiencies in policy-making, management and systems of accountability, it must also revise its attitude and conduct towards the medical profession. This was also a finding of the Tooke review. We are glad to see emerging evidence – in the Department's response to the Report, and in reconstruction – that the process of repair has begun.
3. We again reiterate our support for the principles first set out in '*Unfinished Business*'. A deep discontent arose out of neglect in the translation of those principles into specific policies, plans and implementation. We cannot but agree with the conclusion of the Committee [300] that 'The management of the introduction of the MMC reforms by the Department of Health was inept. Key policy decisions and the processes for making and documenting them were ineffective and the medical profession, while frequently consulted, rarely influenced critical decisions. The governance systems for the programme were far too complicated, roles and responsibilities were ill-defined and lines of accountability were irrational and blurred'. More pointedly, as the Tooke Review observed, 'there is an open question as to whether the Department of Health has the resources and professional skills to implement something of this nature'.
4. Faced with a Department that did not heed warnings from many quarters it is evident too that the medical profession was inadequately prepared to mount an effective coherent response so as to influence shifts in policy or to hold back the rush into chaos. Medical leadership came but was late and could not prevent the harm caused, but only effect repair. It was unable to restore confidence across the profession.
5. The professional institutions, necessarily mindful of their responsibilities in rather circumscribed domains, did not act in concert until late in the process. As the Tooke Review put it: '...individual medical constituencies all too often responded as such rather than exhibiting the professional leadership required to resolve issues of importance to the service as a whole'.
6. These have been salutary judgments and tempering experiences for the Academy, the Colleges and the medical profession. Important lessons have been learned from them.

Aspects of the Report of the Health Select Committee

7. We agree with Sir John Tooke [298] on the need for the profession to 'find a way of speaking coherently' in order to influence future policy development, and that 'the medical profession should have an organisation or mechanism that enables coherent advice to be offered on matters affecting the entire profession'. Naturally it is expected that the provision of such advice is complemented by a willingness to seek, heed and evaluate it wisely. Thus we agree with recommendation [37] 'that future consultation with the medical profession is more than a superficial exercise, that differences of opinion among consultees are reconciled where possible, and that the outcomes of consultation are clearly recorded'.

8. In evidence to the Committee [296] the Chairman of the Academy, Dame Carol Black, acknowledged that the Academy had as yet not been able '... to do the things that you would require it to do'. However, the conclusion [307] that 'the weak and tokenistic nature of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges was exposed by the MMC crisis' does not at all reflect the nature of the Academy, the responsibilities of its members and the relationships between them, or the progress that has been made.

The Academy; its role and relationships

9. The Memorandum and Articles of Association state the following objects:

'The protection and preservation of health and the relief of sickness by supporting, promoting and coordinating the work of the Medical Royal Colleges and their Faculties as defined in their respective Charters and by providing a forum for discussion and collaboration among the Medical Royal Colleges and their Faculties (but without prejudice to the autonomy of each body) so as to promote for the benefit of the public the efficiency and effectiveness of the Medical Royal Colleges and their Faculties'.

A proposed revision along the following lines is currently under discussion:

'The protection and improvement of health and healthcare by supporting, promoting and coordinating the work of the Medical Royal Colleges and their Faculties as defined in their charters, respecting the autonomy of each body and, by giving unity to their efforts and concerns, enhancing the public benefit they bring'.

10. From its origins as the Conference of Colleges and subsequent evolution the Academy has provided a forum for discussion and collaboration, and a path for communication between the constituent bodies and between them and government. Until two years ago it was only modestly endowed and supported by a small infrastructure.
11. Further development has enabled it to assist the common aims of the Medical Royal Colleges and Faculties and of the Health Departments by undertaking a wide range of work to maintain and advance standards of education, training and practice and health service delivery*. The Academy offers means of focusing relations between the Colleges and bodies that have wide national remits, among them professional and other educational bodies, regulatory bodies, government and NHS organisations.
12. Thus the Academy interlocks with the Colleges, 'supporting, promoting and coordinating their work and providing a forum for discussion and collaboration'. By virtue of its collective voice reached by consensus, the Academy can support and add weight and balance to College views. This has been brought out strongly and consistently in recent examples of advice to government, policy statements and responses to formal consultations. Under conditions that allowed careful deliberation, the Academy has been able to establish shared positions on matters such as reform of medical regulation, the just treatment of international medical graduates, and the principles to be observed in service reconfiguration.

Recommendation of the Health Select Committee

13. The Health Select Committee has made the recommendation [33] **'that the Royal Colleges review the role of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and consider replacing it with an executive body which has the authority to make decisions on behalf of all the Colleges'**.
14. In 2007, in the light of its recent development and new legislation in relation to charitable bodies, the Academy decided that it should undertake a formal review of its objects and relationships, and of its governance arrangements. That work is in progress and has generated wider discussion of the Academy's role and how it might improve its working and effectiveness.
15. The Trustees of the Academy – the Presidents of the various Colleges and Faculties – have given careful consideration to the Select Committee's recommendation. The Academy is mindful both of

the circumstances in which the recommendation was made, and executive changes put in train as a consequence of the Committee's work and of the Tooke review. The Academy is also sensitive to the autonomous standing of the Colleges in their specialised domains, enshrined in their constitutions.

16. In the light of progress already made, the preferred strategy is that the Academy should focus on defined issues that are central to its stated aims and objectives and relevant to all or most Colleges and Faculties (i.e. they should be 'generic' in nature), and promote and support the Colleges and Faculties working in concert.
17. We are confident that this approach, building on tested experience and in liaison with other interested parties, offers further strengthening of the Academy's work, providing an important mechanism for enabling coherent advice to be advanced on matters concerning the whole medical profession.
18. Accordingly, after careful and robust consideration, and whilst understanding the reasons for the proposal, the Academy cannot accept the Committee's suggestion of an 'executive body' with authority to make decisions on behalf of all the Colleges. However, the Academy can and will be a strong unifying voice on generic issues, such as those raised by Modernising Medical Careers, that are of major importance to all doctors and their patients.

*We refer the Committee to recent reports made by the Academy to the Department of Health.