

ACB Council November 2007

Welcome

Dr Watson did not chair this Council meeting as he was undertaking Antipodean duties on behalf of the ACB. In his absence Dr Graham Beastall, ACB President, chaired the meeting. His first task was to welcome Dr Julian Barth as a new National Member.

Topics of the Day

The three potentially contentious topics of the day were:

- Our NHS Our Future
- Modernising Scientific Careers
- Broadening the Membership

Our NHS Our Future – interim report

This is a report issued by Lord Darzi on the future of the NHS. The full report can be viewed via:

<http://www.ournhs.nhs.uk/2007/10/04/lord-darzi-launches-his-interim-report/>

Dr Watson had responded to the review on behalf of the ACB, He has:

- Endorsed the principle that change should be clinically led
- Welcomed the proposed Health Innovation Centre
- Supported the proposed Academic Health Sciences Centre
- Highlighted the importance of diagnostics in any altered service model
- Supported one-stop care but emphasised the need for quality
- Recommended linkage to the Carter report
- Suggested representation from diagnostics on the Future Strategy panel
- Emphasised the need for IT connectivity across a devolved model of health delivery
- Suggested that patients could 'own' their laboratory results
- Advised that laboratory medicine has an established history of benchmarking
- Recommended linkage to Modernising Scientific Careers
- Advised that Commissioners need support to understand diagnostic services
- Stressed that proposed changes must be adequately resourced

Dr Beastall invited Council Members to respond to the review as individuals, departments or regions, and to encourage colleagues to read the interim review and respond and engage with the review process at local level.

Modernising Scientific Careers

The Chief Scientific Officer, Prof Sue Hill, assisted by Dr Shelley Heard (former Lead Medical Dean for Pathology and current Director of Education at the Royal College of Pathologists) has initiated a five year project to revise and simplify education and training for all Healthcare Scientists (HCS) across the nine stages of the HCS Career Framework. The aim is to produce HCS who are trained fit for purpose and who are capable of greater career flexibility than at present.

Dr Beastall said the project is at an early stage and details are sketchy. The ACB has been prohibited from distributing any of the materials created to date, but a first draft proposal for comment will be issued after a meeting on 11 December 2007. A few of the initial proposals are:

- An explicit learning and development programme for career stages 1-4
- A new BMedSci to underpin the career pathway
- A 3 year route for registration for HCS involving rotation across disciplines (life sciences, physical sciences and physiological sciences)
 - Two years 'general' training, one year specialist training
- General registration followed by competitive selection for
 - Either guaranteed higher specialist training (e.g. to MRCPATH)
 - Or employment with further professional development (the experiential route)
- Standard and curriculum based training linked to NOS
- More academic training and development – including clinical /research
- Opportunities for those in employment to develop into 'academics'
- Higher level of registration equivalent to medical specialist register
- Leadership development for those at career stages 8&9
- Possible need for a membership body for HCS (e.g. Academy)

The proposals were discussed at length by Council. While welcoming some of the higher level concepts concern was expressed in two areas. Firstly, the three-year route would be Higher Education Institution led, so the people employed could be students rather than employees. Secondly, Council Members questioned what these trainees would actually be able to do, having obtained general registration after three years. ACB Executive had already discussed the above and reached broadly similar conclusions.

This topic is of particular relevance to the profession and will undoubtedly be discussed in greater detail at Executive and Council as further details emerge.

Broadening the Membership

Dr Gordon Challand proposed, at this year's ACB Annual General Meeting, that the ACB should consider broadening its membership. The AGM agreed that this matter should go to Council where Dr Gwyn McCreanor, ACB Secretary, was asked to lead a project to assess the views of the membership. Dr McCreanor enlisted the help of the National Members, Dr Julian Barth, Dr Ian Godber and Dr Nigel Lawson who wrote a paper that was circulated to, and discussed by, Council Members. In the paper an initial series of seven proposals had been whittled down to four:

1. Do nothing
2. Remove affiliate membership
3. Open ordinary membership to anyone with a science or medical degree
4. Open ordinary membership to all

As could be expected, the paper generated an enthusiastic debate that lasted approximately one hour. Dr Beastall summarised the agreed thoughts of Council.

- Membership should be limited to someone who works in / has worked in the profession or an associated profession. Proposed Members could be vetted through a nomination process.
- Membership would be open to people working in other laboratory medicine disciplines.
- Affiliate membership should be removed. There may need to be a Retired Members category with some payment for membership. Trainees could be Ordinary Members, but pay lower subscriptions.

Council agreed, that based on these discussions, Dr McCreanor and the National Members will prepare a further document for the next Council meeting. Agreed proposals can then be taken to the 2008 AGM for consideration.

The author remembers, some years ago, when similar issues were hotly debated, nay argued, at his ACB Region's AGM and elsewhere, but limited progress was achieved. To permit a discussion at the next Council meeting that is informed and represents everyone's ideas, it is hoped that today's ACB Members will air their views via ACB News, Regional Representatives or Regional Committees.

Steve Goodall, Assistant Secretary