

A consultation on strengthening the NHS Constitution

Association of UK University Hospitals and Medical Schools Council response

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The Association of UK University Hospitals and the Medical Schools Council represent the interests of the 33 UK medical schools and 44 university hospitals, which are at the forefront of patient-centred care, teaching the medical workforce of the future, and research across the UK.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on strengthening the NHS Constitution. The amendments to the Constitution are a useful update to help clarify the common purpose of those working in the NHS and meet the growing expectations of patients and the public.

Medical schools are already working to ensure that students are both selected for the values outlined in the NHS Constitution and educated to work by those principles in practice. We believe that these values form an effective framework for the recruitment, training and assessment of healthcare students and those working in the NHS. University hospitals will continue to uphold the principles in the NHS Constitution through a time of financial challenge.

The prominence of commitments to ensure a research intensive culture in the NHS is particularly welcome. To further enhance the Constitution, we feel that **the importance of teaching in the NHS should be given equal prominence to research**. The Academy of Medical Sciences' publication *'Redressing the balance: the status and valuation of teaching in academic careers in the biomedical sciences'* makes clear that:

"Good teaching inspires students and changes lives; it also drives the UK's research base, leading to a virtuous circle between education and research that generates new knowledge and brings health, societal and economic benefits"

Enshrining this parity into a number of the suggested amendments would be valuable. For example (suggested additions in blue text): "to anonymise the data collected during the course of your treatment and use it to support research, **education & training** and improve care for others (pledge)".

In addition, we feel that the constitution should include an explicit commitment **to support research conducted by researchers at every stage of their professional development**. Making this support explicit in the constitution will recognise the important contributions made by new and junior researchers as well as their more experienced colleagues. This could assist the support of beneficial and suitable research proposals from more junior researchers by commissioners.

To ensure the successful implementation of new pledges, sufficient resources will be required. For example:

- to ensure the parity of mental and physical health it is vital that there is sufficient community provision of services (e.g. dementia services).
- intelligent commissioning of appropriate services will be needed to “make it clear to patients, their families and carers how the NHS supports them through care that is coordinated and tailored around their needs and preferences”. Giving examples to highlight these efforts may be helpful.
- delivery of single sex wards will be extremely challenging for many institutions to deliver with existing resources.
- systems, policies and training will be required to ensure staff have the means and are reminded to “make every contact count”.