

A question of balance

The Institute's Council and some of its officers have been involved for a number of years in the evolution of the *Modernising Scientific Careers* initiative. It is now clear from the communications received and also the 'chatter' on the website forum that the potential implications of these proposals are now exercising the minds of our membership – and rightly so.

The dark humour that has been so characteristic of biomedical scientists over the years is to the fore, with ingenious redefinitions of the *Modernising Scientific Careers* abbreviation (MSC) forcing a smile despite the fact that the project challenges much of what the Institute's foundations are built upon. Nevertheless, the more cynical among us have to recognise that things do change and there is no stopping that. However, change cannot justify itself. Change can only be justified by improvement.

There does seem to be parallels between the *Modernising Medical Careers* initiative and the MSC project, and one can only hope that lessons have been learned from the former, and that the same mistakes in judgement will not be repeated in the latter. There can be no doubt that in recent years there has been unprecedented growth in the application of science in the cause of healthcare and patient treatment, and no doubt there are many more to come. We have a situation in which many staff members in the health service are unclear about exactly who does what, and indeed exactly

what some of the 'whats' are! What chance, therefore, for the general public?

There must be sense in attempting to put in place a structure for education and training that harmonises as far as possible the entire sector. Therein lies the challenge. To embrace all professions, some of whom have been in existence for 100 years while others have yet to mark a decade of existence, compounded with massive differences in numbers, in a unified system is extreme in its difficulty, and I am confident that any member of the MSC team would attest to this.

It is a matter of fact that biomedical scientists represent the largest group by far that have a direct challenge to current practice through the proposals of MSC. However, there are elements in the project that must gain universal support – the regulation of the physiological sciences and a career structure for the plethora of support grades being just two.

The Institute, together with Unite, the trades union, has already expressed significant concerns to ministers, and to be fair the Chief Scientific Officer met

immediately with both organisations to discuss these. Indeed, a series of meetings (one every six weeks) has been arranged with the Institute. This is an important initiative because we all know that "the devil lies in the detail". Of course, all this is overshadowed by the upcoming election. Irrespective of the colour(s) of the outcome, there is no doubt that Draconian financial measures will follow, which may well muddy the waters even further.

While the starting point for the MSC project may be somewhat hazy, I am confident that all would agree on the desired outcome. The health service needs to offer an attractive, open-ended and fair career structure to science graduates in the future. This must be fit for purpose and meet the needs of the service. Higher education institutions, through local liaison, should fashion degree programmes that meet this requirement, and those who practise should be regulated – just like the current biomedical scientist model, really! ■

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