



THE ASSOCIATION OF ANAESTHETISTS

of Great Britain & Ireland

Professor the Lord Darzi of Denham KBE
The House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

25th September 2008

Dear Lord Darzi,

I write to you as Chairman of the Group of Anaesthetists in Training (GAT) Committee. Earlier this year, I wrote to invite you to our Annual Scientific Meeting, held in Liverpool in July. During this extremely successful academic and medico-political meeting, the *NHS: Next Stage Review* was, understandably, a hot topic amongst trainees and created much debate. In this letter, I hope to relay some of the concerns and questions raised.

The GAT Committee entirely supports the aim of providing a high quality National Health Service to carry us forward into the next decade and recognises that one of the key steps to achieving this is a strong, reliable postgraduate training programme.

In 2007, we expressed our support for the recommendations of Sir John Tooke's final report, *Aspiring to Excellence*, and acknowledge that many of the recommendations are endorsed in the *Next Stage Review*. We specifically welcome the commitment that all UK medical graduates will be guaranteed a pre-registration doctor post, the incorporation of leadership and management experience into training programmes, endorsement of the eligibility of CCT holders to apply for consultant posts and the creation of NHS:MEE with clear lines of accountability.

We are, however, concerned that proposed changes to the postgraduate training pathway are to be delayed until 2010. The lack of flexibility in the current programme will significantly impact on the careers of a generation of trainees, particularly in the context of diminishing working hours with the European Working Time Directive. We feel the assumption that trainees will voluntarily leave training programmes to gain experience is

not realistic and have survey evidence to support this. We are also disappointed that details of the training pathway have not been clearly set out as the Secretary of State for Health, in his response to *Aspiring to Excellence*, indicated they would be.

Workforce planning is a concern for many trainees. We acknowledge the proposal for national and local arrangements but would question how it is envisaged that the employer will lead workforce planning and how it will be matched to training. In addition, who will ensure sufficient consultation with the medical profession?

Finally, the 'lack of trust between the Department of Health and the profession' is felt nowhere greater than amongst those who have suffered directly from the recent turbulent period. Trainees feel that they, now more than ever, have little control over the direction of their careers and feelings of helplessness are rife. What measures will be introduced to ensure the morale of this workforce, now and in the future?

I look forward to your reply and to communicating your answers to our membership.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Meadows". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Chris Meadows
Chair, GAT Committee