

An Influence Strategy for Pathology

1. **The change context.** The pathology profession and healthcare generally face some major challenges. On top of the Carter Review¹ and Darzi Report², significant changes are being wrought by the 2012 Health & Social Care Act. At the same time organisations and trusts continue to address the 'Nicholson Challenge'³. Looking ahead and notwithstanding promises to protect health, budgets for the three years up to FY 17/18 set within the Comprehensive Spending Review will only emerge from intense political debate right up to early 2015. On a different slant, the constant stream of really exciting developments emerging from the marriage of scientific research, study and technology offers significant leaps forward in the precision, speed and quality of diagnoses and opportunities to improve the quality of human and veterinary patient outcomes. With a renewed emphasis on quality, clinical effectiveness and clinical leadership, there are now new opportunities for the profession to demonstrate and further develop its fundamental role in modern healthcare.
2. **The College response.** In recognition of change, the College initiated its 50-year review. Adjustments in governance, roles and structures plus better working practices are well underway and, having successfully set the stage, the College will consider how it can lead the profession through the haze of competing demands and priorities. These include: informing, guiding and advising policy-makers to help them make the right decisions; ensuring the benefits of progress are shared across specialties and are supported in a way that ensures accurate, reliable, timely and consistent outcomes for patients; maintaining a firm yet evolving stance on quality and standards, and delivering outstanding support to the membership. To do this the College needs to build on its mission with a strategy that focuses its work and marshals its resources.
3. **The mission statement.** The extant mission statement for the College is '*to promote excellence in the practice of pathology and to be responsible for maintaining standards through training, assessments, examinations and professional development, to the benefit of the public*'. However, the Executive has acknowledged that the College has fallen behind in the obligation to promote research and study. To correct this, the statement could be modified to read as follows:

Mission: *to promote excellence in coherent study, research and practice of pathology and to be responsible for maintaining the highest standards through training, assessments, examinations and professional development, to the benefit of the public*
4. **The strategic challenges.** Discussions within the Executive plus input from key appointees identify the following specific challenges that the College needs to address:
 - How to adjust to structural change in the NHS.
 - How to contribute fully to high quality outcomes for patients in a patient-aware service.
 - Determining how evolution of the academic and research base can better enable the practice of pathology to stay abreast of advancing scientific enquiry.

¹ Report of the Second Phase of the Review of NHS Pathology Services in England Chaired by Lord Carter of Coles, dated 2008.

² Command Paper: *High Quality Care for All – NHS Next Stage Review Final Report*, dated 30 June 2008.

³ A recurrent efficiency saving of approximately £20bn to be achieved by FY 14/15.

- How to improve on shortcomings within current EQA systems.
- Ensuring that all pathology specialties and wider clinical disciplines are able to exploit the opportunities and benefits of the molecular revolution.
- How to ensure recognition for the pathologists' contribution to clinical leadership and better enable their input within multi-disciplinary teams.
- Ways to improve how pathologists can support commissioning so that pathology services are commissioned intelligently.
- How to respond to budgetary pressures and ensure that the pathologists' contribution to patient outcomes is efficient and effective.
- How to contribute to resolving the cultural misalignment between managers and clinicians.

5. **The vision.** The Royal Charter sets out the primary Objects of the College⁴, but these and the mission statement do not specifically address the challenges above. To focus effort over the next five years a vision statement is needed:

Vision: *In five years the College will have established itself as the preferred national advisor and an influential international advisor on accurate, reliable and consistent pathology provision. It will have built a vibrant and inter-connected professional community grounded in scientific inquiry, understood and respected across medicine and science, which delivers accurate diagnosis as the cornerstone of patient care and treatment.*

6. **Strategic goals.** In working towards the vision, analysis suggests that three strategic goals that will guide activity through the forward plan are:

Adapt: *to create influential linkages with the HEE and devolved nation structures, revise training and education to ground professionals in the capabilities of the profession as a whole and equip the consultants of tomorrow to enable and deliver clinical effective service, overhaul EQA to meet the needs of patients, and demonstrate measurable improvement in effective practice.*

Engage: *to validate the College provision to its members, successfully establish its position in provision of policy advice through prospective consultation and deliver the first stage of the international strategy 'Pathology is Global'.*

Inspire: *to increase awareness and understanding of pathology as a career, firmly establish a Pathology Journal, and enable the sustainable development of pathology provision.*

7. **Next steps.** The revised Forward Plan already covers the majority of work needed to support the strategy which is shown diagrammatically at the Appendix. Nonetheless there are gaps in realising the benefits of the molecular revolution, measuring the effect of the College's plans, engaging in policy formulation, reflecting members' needs in College services, building professional identity and promoting research among trainees. Work on these aspects will need to be driven forward.

Head of Operations

Appendix - Strategy Diagram (proposed)

⁴ College objects: 'advance the science and practice of pathology', 'further public education therein', and 'promote study and research work in pathology and related subjects and publish the results of such study and research'.

Appendix – Strategy Diagram (proposed)

RCPATH MISSION: 'to promote excellence in coherent study, research and practice of pathology and to be responsible for maintaining standards through training, assessments, examinations and professional development, to the benefit of the public'.

