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RESTRUCTURING THE SOCIETY FOR THE FUTURE

In an ideal world, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society would have reconfigured both sides of its activities at the same time. But the speed with which the Government has expected the health care professions to put their regulatory houses in order has meant that the Society — unique in that it is much more than a pure regulator — has not yet addressed one important area: what structure(s) should be put in place to ensure the Council has the best support on professional issues and the Society's members have confidence that their interests are central to decision-making?

Possibly, if the reconfiguration of the professional structures had occurred at the same time as the regulatory overhaul, certain groups among the membership might not have been so concerned that the Society was losing its unique identity and turning into a regulator alone.

Now, however, the time has come to consider the professional structures and in this week's issue there is a discussion document (after p420) outlining the Society's thinking on professional leadership and development and putting forward some preliminary ideas of what the structure(s) might be.

Three models are offered for comment, although the document "Professional leadership and development: what is it, and how should the Society do it?" emphasises that there will be many others and invites members to put their own suggestions forward.

The second model comprising a Senate sitting just below the Council is, at first glance, more appealing than the other two. It looks much simpler and it indicates that the pharmacists who serve on the Council would also serve on the Senate. There tend to be improved lines of communication if structures are simple and that, at least, should be an important consideration in whatever model is adopted. With the other two models the lines of communication do not appear to be so straightforward, although they have the benefit of ensuring formal input from the branch network, as well as Scotland and Wales.

Another important consideration will be cost. If servicing the new structure turns out to be more expensive than the current set-up and members do not see results at the end of the process, they may feel resentful. However, if the new structures are seen to be delivering what the membership wants, any extra cost might be tolerated.

These are the easy issues with which to grapple; the document is packed with more complicated matters that members will want to address before a final structure is agreed by Council. Let us hope that the final structure, which will inevitably be a compromise, has the confidence of the membership.