

Sorting out the ifs and buts

In 18 months' time, the General Pharmaceutical Council is set to gain its independence and the professional body is to be launched. Really? There are so many "ifs" and "buts" to be negotiated along the way that *The Journal* questions whether this is possible.

In this week's issue, a **Broad spectrum** article (p622) from the Institute of Pharmacy Management sets out one way for the professional body to be established using the transitional committee (as recommended by the Clarke Inquiry) and by employing a project manager. For the purposes of the article, *The Journal* assumes that, although the

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process is acknowledged to be complicated, the steps involved in getting from today to 1 January 2010 have been simplified and that there is also an assumption that each step will proceed smoothly to the next. Even accepting those assumptions, the author is concerned about the dangers of rushing into the setting up of a future body and argues it would be better to ensure that the organisation has wide appeal than that some artificial timetable is met.

The Journal fully agrees with the concern. Even assuming that the new professional body can emerge with the Society's Charter objects intact, the profession has been promised that it will be consulted on any proposals. And while the transitional committee may have considerable influence on what the body will look like, if it intends the Society's buildings and assets to underpin the new body, it will have to have the agreement of the Society's Council — because the Council has fiduciary responsibility to make sure that the Society's assets are used wisely — before seeking the necessary approval of the Society's membership.

Moreover, who is going to run the professional body? In the long-term, its members will elect the new governing board but, until there are any members, there will have to be a temporary board; how will that be picked and by whom?

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It would make sense to flag up now that this schedule is too challenging and to tell the Department of Health that it is impossible to meet. Once the transitional committee is up and running it should, as a matter of priority, calculate a launch date that will make sense to all the parties interested in the professional body, and give it and the General Pharmaceutical Council a chance to work properly from day 1.

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