

# Welsh responses to devolution review

Responses to the stakeholder consultation document issued by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's devolution review group were discussed at a meeting in Cardiff this week. **Hannah Pike** reports

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society must ensure that it recognises England, Scotland and Wales as unique entities, without forming a fragmented Society.

This is the general message from responses to the devolution review group's consultation (*PJ*, 9 October, p543) that were submitted in writing before the Cardiff meeting this week.

Although the stakeholders have provided individual responses, key messages are echoed by several bodies, notably the importance of the pharmacy profession remaining united.

The review group suggested that respondents classify the key functions of the Society as "unitary" (functions which would be performed better at a Great Britain level), "hybrid" (functions which have elements which should be performed at GB level but have other elements that may be better carried out at national level),

"national" (functions which would be best performed at an English, Scottish or Welsh level) or "neutral" (functions which could be performed either at GB or national level).

In its response to the consultation, the Welsh Executive of the Society stresses that it fully supports the concept of one professional and regulatory body for pharmacy across all of Great Britain. It classifies control of entry to the profession and the determination of policy for preregistration education and training as "unitary" responsibilities, saying that these are three core aspects defining the nature of the profession. It considers many of the Society's other functions to be "hybrid", including the provision of strategic leadership for the profession and setting and enforcing standards of practice.

The only function that the Welsh Executive considers to be better carried out at a national level is the implementation of continuous professional development, although it believes that the determination of policy for CPD should be classed as a unitary function. "On the one hand, a degree of unity across the profession is required to maintain a common identity for pharmacists. On the other hand, of all the educational elements CPD is the one most closely linked to the demands of service provision, which are likely to vary between the nations," it states.

The Welsh Executive lists five suggestions to render the Society "fit for the world of devolution". These include the suggestion that, except in aspects clearly falling within the regulatory powers reserved to Great Britain, the Society should not take GB-wide action

unless it is more effective than action taken at national level. It acknowledges that in many cases it is more efficient for staff resources to be concentrated at one point within the Society rather than be dispersed around England, Scotland and Wales, but says that mechanisms should be developed to ensure that all nations can access these resources. It also suggests that in addition to the two places on the Council reserved for each nation, a number of places should be reserved on the key bodies beneath Council to represent each nation in decision-making.

The Welsh Executive's full response can be accessed via a link on *PJ Online* ([www.pjonline.com/links](http://www.pjonline.com/links)).

Community Pharmacy Wales has issued a preliminary response before its full response which is expected after a board meeting next week. It gives a more general

response to the review since it is "broadly in agreement" with the Welsh Executive's response and was involved in the production of it.

CPW emphasises the need for a GB-wide approach to professional leadership and a voice for the profession, saying that the Society must be responsive to the work the Welsh Executive requires of it. "There will be a need for some policy-making powers to be conferred, as permitted by the new Charter, to the Welsh Executive — power to make policy to fit any issues arising in Wales for which there is no policy in Great Britain generally or where the present GB policy does not fit," it states.

CPW says that there is a "deep suspicion" within the National Assembly and NHS institutions of organisations which develop policy for Wales but which are based in England. "At best they feel misunderstood; at worst, patronised and interfered with." The response states that although this leads to a natural desire for radical devolution, heightened by intended further political devolution to include some primary legislative powers in the wake of the Richard Commission report on Welsh devolution (*PJ*, 17 April, p464) there is much to be gained by working closely together. "It is time to see the Society as a tripartite structure with each home country being recognised, involved and seen to be important as part of an organic whole," it concludes.

The Welsh Executive points out that to achieve maximum value for money in the administration of the Society's business, and to reduce the perceived dominance of the

London/England agenda, consideration should be given to relocating central departments from Lambeth to Cardiff, Edinburgh or elsewhere.

This view is echoed in the response given by the Association of Pharmacy Technicians which says that the improvement in electronic facilities would support such a change in practice and help develop a more inclusive structure.

The consultants in pharmaceutical public health at the National Public Health Service for Wales are of the opinion that all policy and standards in relation to pharmacy practice should be formulated on a unitary basis with the rate of implementation managed and monitored by the national executive body in response to local needs.

In the response provided by the Welsh School of Pharmacy, all of the Society's functions are classified as being either unitary or hybrid. It states: "We find no place for the national and neutral categories. These latter categories seem to fly in the face of maintaining a main headquarters building and operation in London. To have purely Wales- or Scotland- based functions would be to invite expensive duplication of expertise and operations from London to Cardiff and Edinburgh — and the unwelcome feature of 'mixed messages' from the Society."

The Welsh School of Pharmacy adds that that many elements of policy and procedures will, and should be, identical across Great Britain, both for the Society and for pharmacy practitioners. They say that this is especially true for university-based education and that the Society should be just as focused on these features of pharmacy education as on the "secondary effects of how the UK government and civil service choose to organise themselves." It says: "The Society seems overly focused on differences between the three home countries."

## The Society seems overly focused on differences between the three home countries

### Welsh language scheme

Language issues were also discussed at the meeting and the review group agreed that the Society should adopt a Welsh language scheme. This would set out how the Society will conduct its functions bearing in mind the requirements of Welsh speakers and potentially including publication of written material in the Welsh language. Ann Lewis, the Society's Secretary and Registrar told *The Journal*: "There will be a recommendation, for consideration by the Council in December, that the Council confirms an intent to adopt a Welsh Language Scheme for the Society and for discussions to be initiated with the Welsh Language Board with a view to drawing up the scheme."