

National boards for England, Wales and Scotland — a consultation

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society is consulting on the main recommendations of its Devolution Review Group. An abridged version of the consultation document, together with the group's recommendations and questions for respondents to consider, is set out here

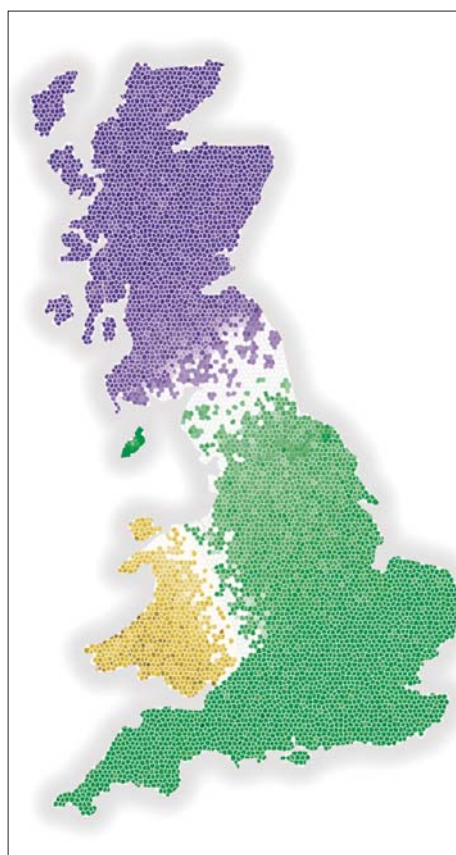
Over the past year, a review group chaired by Lord Fraser of Carmyllie, has examined how the Royal Pharmaceutical Society might be structured to ensure effective working following the creation of the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly with significant, if different, direct power over health, and therefore over the work of pharmacy practice. The Fraser Report has proposed that the Scottish and Welsh Executives be replaced with “national boards” and that a national board be established for England to provide, in each case, a national focus on pharmacy practice that can be represented to what is increasingly becoming three national health services.

The story so far

Since the introduction of political devolution in 1999, the Society has sought to shape and influence policy relating to pharmacy in three governments: Westminster, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. A degree of policy divergence between England, Scotland and Wales has now begun to emerge and this is expected to increase further, particularly should there be different political parties in Government at Westminster, Edinburgh and Cardiff. Examples of this type of divergence to date include the phased introduction of the abolition of prescription charges in Wales and the wholesale rejection of the Office of Fair Trading proposals for the community pharmacy contract and the proposals for banning smoking in public places in Scotland. The three pharmacy strategies for England, Scotland and Wales clearly demonstrate that each country has its own plan for the delivery of pharmaceutical care and that pharmacy is key in the delivery of each country's health care agenda. The plans can be summarised as follows:

England “Pharmacy in the future” sets out a vision of how pharmacy can play a full part in delivering the vision of the new modernised English NHS as outlined in “The NHS — a plan for investment, a plan for reform”, published in July 2000. This strategy for pharmacy aims to give patients the right care at the right time, in the right way and of the right quality.

It should be noted that “Pharmacy in the future” also sets out the vision for reserved matters, in particular the modernisation of professional regulation consistent with the plan for the reform of the regulation of all health professionals.



Scotland “The right medicine” is the Scottish Executive Health Department strategy for pharmaceutical care. Key elements of the strategy will enable pharmacists in both primary and secondary care to provide a professional service that meets the needs of the population. Part of the strategy aims to get the message to the public that community pharmacy is part of NHS (Scotland). In Scotland, community pharmacies are recognised as the first access point for many primary care health services; this is different from England, where walk-in-centres are a distinct feature and separate from other NHS services.

Wales “Remedies for success” is the Welsh Assembly Government's vision for the future of pharmacy in Wales. This 10-year pharmacy strategy sets out to provide people in Wales with access to pharmaceutical care that is fast, convenient, appropriate for their needs and consistently delivered to a high standard. Although similar to the English and Scottish strategies, there are issues that are unique to the Welsh strategy.

It is important for the future of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society in all parts of Great Britain that it provides proper recognition of the fact that although the regulation of existing health professionals remains a power reserved to the Westminster Parliament, health policy is fully devolved to the Welsh Assembly Government and the Scottish Parliament. The Society must be able to represent the pharmacy profession fully at the highest level of government in England, Wales and Scotland and ensure that in any health context, it is a key player in the development of policies that have implications for the pharmacy profession and patients.

Role of national boards?

What could be the possible roles of the national boards?

The recommendations of the Devolution Review Group is that each of the national boards would:

- Provide strategic leadership and support for pharmacy practice development — the Scottish and Welsh Executives already send newsletters to members keeping them informed of aspects of pharmacy development for each country
- Assist development of Council policy and its implementation and develop and implement policy specific to that national board's country — the Welsh Executive provided vital input into the Council's policy on prescription charges
- Promote pharmacy and its contribution to health — the Society's Scottish and Welsh Executives already work closely with key players within the pharmacy profession ensuring that pharmacy and its contribution to the health agenda is promoted on a country-specific basis
- Provide professional advice to government (the Westminster Parliament, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly), its agencies, NHS bodies, and other health and social care organisations — members of the Scottish and Welsh Executives engage wherever possible with those who can influence the health care agenda in the devolved bodies
- Support the Society's branches — the branches in Scotland and Wales have a much clearer route into how they are represented at a national level as well as at a GB level, which leads to a closer relationship between the executives and the members

Panel 1: Main recommendations

- In principle, national boards for Scotland and Wales should be constituted to replace the current Scottish and Welsh Executives, and a new national board for England should be constituted. The review group recommends that the national boards should have five prime functions:
 - (i) Provide strategic leadership and support for pharmacy practice development in [country]
 - (ii) Assist development of Council policy and its implementation in [country], and develop and implement policy specific to [country]
 - (iii) Promote pharmacy and its contribution to health
 - (iv) Provide professional advice to government and its agencies, NHS bodies, and other health and social care organisations in [country]
 - (v) Support the Society's branches in [country]
- Concordat(s) should be developed between the three boards and the Council that will set out an agreed working relationship for policy development in the devolved administrations. Concordats are not contracts or a set of rules, but are statements of intention about the way the different parties will work together. The review group suggests that the following points be included:
 - (i) The Council should be informed as soon as possible of any issue with GB implications
 - (ii) In the absence of a timely response from the Council, the national board responds as it sees fit, notwithstanding its acknowledgement that the issue has GB implications
 - (iii) In that event the decision of the national board will be the policy of the Society for the time being BUT
 - (iv) The Council, after consultation, reserves the right to adopt or amend the national board policy and if it does amend that decision the national board will be bound to follow Council policy
- The Statutory (Disciplinary) Committee should continue to hold hearings in London. However it should be prepared to convene elsewhere in GB if required for language reasons (a legal requirement under the Welsh Language Act), legal reasons (Scotland has a separate legal system) or where it is in the public interest to do so.
- Undergraduate and preregistration education should remain a GB function but there could be variations in postgraduate training and education. Postgraduate education would not be wholly devolved to the national boards but would be a joint function.
- To avoid confusion with the corporate arm of the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Executive, the Society's Scottish and Welsh Executives should be renamed, although no recommendation is made as to what they should be called.

The proposed national boards will not be responsible for regulation because political responsibility for this remains with the Westminster Government. However, many issues affecting pharmacy will have both professional and regulatory aspects and the national boards would make a valuable contribution.

Background to the consultation

As part of its reform programme, the Society needs to develop a framework that would reflect devolution in Scotland and Wales encompassing functions, structures and ways of working and allowing the flexibility to extend to any future devolved administration in England. The Devolution Review Group examined the issues surrounding devolution and reported its recommendations to the Council in February 2005. The full report, "Devolution — a framework for the future" is available from the Society's website at www.rpsgb.org or from devolution review project manager Michele Savage (e-mail michele.savage@rpsgb.org).

The Council is aware that other bodies have found there is an inevitable cost to restructuring in order to meet the needs of devolution, so there may be additional costs for providing additional functionality in Edinburgh, Cardiff and, possibly, London.

Some of these additional costs were anticipated in the development of the Society's 2005 budget. However, the final costs will be dependent on the decisions taken by the Council following the consultation. Clearly any solution will need to be affordable.

Next steps

The Society's Council is minded to accept the Devolution Review Group's recommendations that a national board be established for England and that the Scottish and Welsh Executives be replaced by national boards. The national boards would be an important part of structural changes to the Society and their functions would be largely professional rather than regulatory.

The Council is required under its 2004 Charter to consult on any changes to structures in Scotland and Wales. The Council also wishes to take this opportunity to consult on the establishment of a national board for England.

The main recommendations of the Devolution Review Group are set out in Panel 1 and questions that pharmacists should consider in formulating their responses are set out in Panel 2.

The Council hopes that all members in England, Wales and Scotland will participate in this important consultation.

Panel 2: Questions

1. In principle, are you in favour of the establishment of national boards for England, Scotland and Wales? If not, do you favour the establishment of national boards for any of the three home countries of Great Britain? The review group recommends that the Scottish and Welsh Executives should be renamed but has not recommended what they should be called. What do you think the three national structures should be called?
2. The review group has agreed five prime functions for the national boards. The Council would like your views on these functions. Do you think there should be any others?
3. Given the proposed functions of the national boards, what mechanism do you think should be used to achieve effective representation across the profession on the boards? Election may be seen as the most straightforward and transparent means of securing board members. On the other hand, the boards will need a range of skills, knowledge and experience that cannot be guaranteed by election. A combination of methods might be appropriate. Should the boards should be constituted solely by election, or should they have appointees or co-options to ensure access to a spread of expertise? Should there be places for pharmacists from different sectors of practice, places for pharmacists to represent different geographical locations within a country, places for lay members, or places for any others?
4. The review group has recommended the establishment of an English national board and the replacement of the Scottish and Welsh Executives with national boards as the best way to reflect devolution on matters affecting pharmacy in England, Scotland and Wales. What are the risks to the profile and integrity of the Society if the recommendations are not implemented?
5. One of the functions of the national boards suggested by the review group is to support the branches. How could the national boards best support the branches and, through them, the profession?
6. Do you have any other comments?

How to respond

Submissions should be made by e-mail to devolution@rpsgb.org or in writing to Michele Savage, Project Manager, Devolution Review, Royal Pharmaceutical Society, 1 Lambeth High Street, London SE1 7JN, by 18 July.

An unabridged version of this consultation is available from Ms Savage (tel 020 7572 2547, e-mail devolution@rpsgb.org) and a downloadable version, together with a response form, is available at www.rpsgb.org/devolution.