

Acting Executive Director's review of the year 2010

Delivered to Fellows of the Academy at the AGM, 18 November 2010

President, Council members, Fellows and guests, it is a great honour to present the Executive Director's report to the Academy's Annual General Meeting. I have had the pleasure of being Acting Executive Director since Dr Helen Munn went on maternity leave at the end of July.

To echo the President and the Treasurer - this summer and autumn has been extraordinary in that it has seen our relocation to our first headquarters. Hopefully, to you, the Fellowship, and the wider world, the transition has looked relatively smooth and you are pleased with the end result.

One thing that we're particularly proud of is - in a year when the Academy has seen such enormous change - we have also increased activity and impact across our core activities.

As the Registrar has reported, this year's Fellowship election has seen an increase in nominations. I'd like to express my gratitude to all the Fellows who nominated new candidates, updated papers or acted as referees, as well as the 70 or so Fellows who served on our Sectional Committees. The profile and prestige of FMedSci remains our greatest asset and we are indebted to you for your contribution to our work.

Our public lecture programme provides opportunities to celebrate your outstanding achievements and excellence in medical science and to highlight major scientific breakthroughs.

Sir Alec Jeffreys gave a fascinating lecture at New Fellows' Day in June of this year, entitled 'Genetic fingerprinting and beyond'. This was actually the postponed Jean Shanks Lecture - it was a real treat that perfectly rounded off a day of celebration.

I was delighted to accompany the Vice President, Professor Ron Laskey, and The Treasurer, Professor Ian Lauder on a visit to Dundee in September, where the 2010 Sackler Lecture was kindly hosted by Professors Peter Downes and John Connell. Professor David Baulcombe gave an excellent lecture on 'RNA silencing: lessons from plants about control of disease in people' to a rapt audience and this was followed by an excellent dinner.

The President has reported on our high profile policy impacts this year. In summary, we have seen a step change in the Academy's profile and our influence on the government's agenda for medical research. Government Ministers are now beating a path to our door to seek knowledge and wise counsel.

At the dawn of the year we published 'Reaping the rewards: a vision for UK medical science', which was the product of a working group chaired by Sir David Cooksey. This document catalysed two significant streams of work:

- A targeted campaign to protect UK science and health research budgets
- A review of UK medical research regulation

Both of which have had an enormous impact on UK medical research endeavour.

Turning first to the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) - we submitted two consultation responses ahead of the CSR and worked behind the scenes with BIS and Treasury officials, the other Academies and with our industry and charity partners to reinforce a common message.

In addition, at the request of David Willetts MP, Minister of State for Universities and Science, the Academy prepared a briefing on the health and wealth benefits of investing in biomedical research - 'Biomedical research - a platform for increasing health and wealth in the UK'.

These public documents and private briefings were highly influential in securing such a positive outcome in a time of spending cuts. David Willetts cited our briefing paper as a major factor in persuading ministers to continue investment in science.

The 'Vision' document made a number of recommendations, including the need to develop a proportionate, risk-based regulatory framework for medical research involving patients. This proposal was championed by No. 10 and the Academy was subsequently commissioned by the Department of Health to undertake a major, independent review of the regulation and governance of medical research to inform improvements within and beyond the UK. Since then, we have seen a change of Government and we were delighted that they have highlighted that our report will inform their overhaul of medical regulation. Sir Michael Rawlins has been expertly chairing the working group to deliver one of the most complex pieces of work the Academy has ever embarked on, with the most compressed timescale. This is an example of the Academy at its best - setting the UK medical science agenda by identifying a crucial issue that needs to be addressed, influencing policy-makers to prioritise this issue and support us to produce an independent, timely, authoritative report that will catalyse action and enable us to reap the rewards of medical science. This will extend not just nationally, but internationally.

We are not an organisation that rests on its oars, one of our key strengths is our diversity and this is reflected in the breadth and volume of our work portfolio. Our working group on 'Animals containing human material', led by Professor Martin Bobrow, will publish a major, high-profile report in spring 2011. Again this study emerged from a recommendation from the Academy - our 2007 report on inter-species embryos. This government-commissioned study is being supported by: the Department of Health, Medical Research Council, Wellcome Trust, and the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, with additional close involvement from the Home Office.

I would like to emphasise the Academy's ability to form effective working partnerships was crucial to the success of many of our projects.

As mentioned, for the various documents we produced to influence the Spending Review, we collaborated with industry and the charity sector and together managed a co-ordinated campaign with the media.

We are very grateful to the Wellcome Trust and Cancer Research UK for supporting The Review of Medical Regulation by each seconding an excellent member of their policy staff to the Academy to bolster the secretariat for this important project. This support and the links have paid dividends to all organisations in many ways.

Our growing communication and links with the Institute of Medicine in the US is exciting and we are hopeful that we will be able to embark on some joint working in the near future.

To demonstrate the breadth of our interests this year, the other activity I'd like to highlight was our joint symposium on 'Diabetes and obesity' with the Royal Society of Edinburgh, held in Scotland in May. This was our first partnership activity with the RSE and I hope those of you that attended will agree that it was a success.

The Academy is keen to develop a cadre of individuals able to work at the interface between medical science and policymaking. The Academy is therefore collaborating with The Wellcome Trust to offer Wellcome Trust four year PhD students a three month policy internship in the Academy. So far, three interns have joined us and the feedback has been so positive that the Wellcome Trust has agreed to extend this programme for a further 3 years.

The Academy's FORUM continues to be active at the interface between academia and industry, as demonstrated by our inaugural event in this building. The FORUM Annual Lecture in October comprised of a first class lecture by Dr Peggy Hamburg, the FDA Commissioner in the US, coupled with a highly productive roundtable meeting. This event drew together key representatives from the pharma, academic, charitable and funding sectors and many new faces wishing to engage with the Academy. Dr Hamburg was so impressed with the collaborative approach fostered by the Academy that she has committed to continue working with us.

Over the past year, we have been successful in our goal to make connections between NHS, universities and the pharmaceutical industry. Our symposium and subsequent report on 'Academia, industry and the NHS: collaboration and innovation', brought together leading figures from across the sectors. The value of collaboration was highlighted, with emphasis on the importance of creating a wider 'ecosystem' of research and healthcare in which innovation is incubated, gaps between sectors are bridged, and research is underpinned by appropriate regulation.

The Academy's aim to support people is clearly demonstrated by our portfolio of activities that are dedicated to developing the next generation of leading medical researchers.

During the course of 2010 the Academy has exerted increased influence on issues of training and careers policy through the publication of several reports and outputs, including:

- A major working group study, chaired by Professor Keith Gull, on the status and valuation of teaching in academic careers'.
- A symposium report on 'The Bologna Process' – which is an initiative to harmonise higher education across the EU.

We act as a crucial voice for UK academic medicine. Led by Professor Patrick Sissons, we have continued to monitor and influence the development of the revalidation reforms.

And, at the moment we are responding to a consultation on the clinical excellence awards and have set up a working group, chaired by Professor Patrick Maxwell, to influence decision-making on the future of this scheme.

The Academy's activities to provide direct support to aspiring clinical academics has continued to flourish. We continue to work in partnership with other organisations to provide niche funding

schemes that fill a gap. For example, our Starter Grants scheme for research-active Clinical Lecturers which is funded and run in collaboration with the Wellcome Trust. The small start-up awards of £30k have enabled Clinical Lecturers to gather preliminary data that will be used to support grant applications for longer-term funding. We will be reviewing the success of the scheme next year, but we are already receiving emails from awardees telling us that they are securing fellowships and further grants - and they attribute this success to the support they received from us and the Wellcome Trust.

We are also delighted to report that the British Heart Foundation has agreed to contribute funds to the scheme, allowing us to fund more grants in the field of cardiology.

The Academy also runs the 'Daniel Turnberg UK/Middle East Travel Fellowship scheme' -awards are given for short-term travel fellowships to early and mid-career clinical academics and biomedical scientists. 41 awardees have now undertaken research exchanges and we are grateful to the many donors for their very generous support in funding these awards. Feedback from awardees and research supervisors has shown that the scheme is highly valued and a number of longer-term collaborations are being forged as a result of this scheme. A newsletter about the scheme is currently in preparation.

We continue to monitor the progress of our Academy/Health Foundation Clinician Scientist Fellowships, as awardees receive prestigious prizes, publish stellar research papers, secure grants and build their teams. Many of the awardees are involved in the Academy's activities.... I eagerly await the day when one of our funded CSFs is elected to the Academy's Fellowship!

We have been particularly successful in growing our reputation - both nationally and internationally - as a leader of best practice in mentoring young clinical academics. The Fellows' commitment to the scheme has been amazing and has underpinned its success.

The scheme is generously funded by NIHR and we were delighted that they have extended our contract until 2014. We are also bolstering our mentoring and outreach activities in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. Our regional events take all us around the UK; the Academy 'road show' is very well received.

Many organisations are beating a path to our door and asking us to help them set up their own mentoring schemes. In light of this we felt it timely to review our mentoring scheme to gain robust feedback and identify how we could further develop our activities. We therefore commissioned an independent evaluation and this is due to be finalised next month.

Due to growing interest in the scheme, we are working with Dr Geoff Watts to produce a mentoring handbook, which will be published in the spring.

An important part of our outreach work is to inspire medical students and foundation year doctors to undertake research. The Academy/Medical Research Society 'Clinical Champions' scheme goes from strength to strength. Professor Moira Whyte, our Champion in Sheffield, reported that when the scheme began in 2007, there were 21 applications to the academic foundation programme, 3 years on and thanks to Moira's dedication and programme of activities, there are now 160 applications. Our other 7 champs across the UK have all reported local successes. The 'Champs' scheme is complemented by a lively Visiting Lecturer Programme.

Over the past year, we sought to increase our profile and influence in the international arena through targeted meetings of our Foreign Secretary and participation in a number of international forums. This has included participation in the Federation for European Academies of Medicine Annual Meeting. We have worked with FEAM to ensure that the statement on the EU Clinical Trials Directive reflects the UK's position and have provided advice on promoting the document.

We have also been closely working with Inter Academy Medical Panel. Following the publication of our own climate and health statement, we persuaded IAMP to produce its own and have worked as part of the secretariat to produce an international statement that will be published in advance of the climate talks in Cancún, Mexico.

The Foreign Secretary has also accepted invitations to sit on the Government's Global Science and Innovation Forum and the Chatham House Centre for Global Health Security.

The Academy's eighth International Health Lecture was given by Professor Kevin De Cock last week, on 'HIV and global health, 2011'. The lecture drew a very engaged audience and sparked a long and lively discussion - demonstrating that this annual lecture has earned its place in the UK calendar of global health events.

Still on the international theme, it has been suggested to us that we seem to be 'rather good' at taking on large-scale building tasks and new businesses and that perhaps we should consider doing some further 'small' projects. Amongst those suggested by the Fellowship - have been the 2012 Olympics Games... I have no doubt that, together, we could succeed in such a task and knowing the energy, can-do attitude and sporting interests of the staff, they would have a go at the events and most likely come home with a clutch of medals...

But fear not, Dr Helen Munn, our Executive Director, will be back in force early next year and will be leading the Academy forward in developing a new strategic plan.

In the meantime, I would like to thank my co-Directors, Chris Straw and Rachel Quinn. It has very much been a team effort whilst Helen has been away on maternity leave. As the President has said, the Academy staff have done a superb job this year - they have continued to drive our core projects and activities forward and have worked with such commitment and flexibility during the transition to our new headquarters.

Looking forward, one thing the staff are very excited about - is welcoming you, the Fellows, to our new home and having you here with us more regularly. We are certain that our 'new hub for medical science' will help generate even more ideas and opportunities, for us to take forward as an Academy.

On behalf of the office staff - thank you very much for your ongoing support.

Dr Suzanne Candy, November 2010