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Appointment to Heads of School, Health Education England

FSSA Position Statement, August 2016

The Federation of Surgical Specialty Associations (FSSA) which represents all 10 GMC recognised surgical specialties in the UK and Ireland, is concerned by the potential precedent set by the recent appointment of a non-medically qualified radiographer to the post of Head of School for Radiology in the Yorkshire Deanery.

We fully appreciate the level of skill, dedication and experience of colleagues from the professions allied to medicine, and that the delivery of medical care and thus the training of doctors, requires an integrated approach involving all the professions to train doctors that are rounded and fully competent in holistic care delivered by a team.

However, the overall responsibility for the care of patients remains firmly at the door of the senior medical staff, and their training has to be delivered in such a way as to enable them to accept and deal with that level of responsibility. We think that unless there is incontrovertible evidence to disprove this, that the teaching and training of medical staff should therefore remain in the hands of those that appreciate these issues and who have experienced them first hand.

The FSSA is not in a position to comment on individual appointments but having discussed this issue feel it important that job specifications for Heads of School, and, in particular, essential qualifications and experience, must be clearly defined prior to any short listing process. We would urge HEE to recognise the importance of involving the designated specialties and Colleges in this process. A prerequisite of this appointment process would, in our view, be the involvement of at least one senior medically qualified relevant specialist within the designated area of interest who is in good standing with either the appropriate Medical Royal College or Specialty Association.

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The FSSA welcomes the announcement on 16th August 2016 that HEE has agreed to a rerun of the process of appointing a new Head of the Yorkshire and Humber School of Radiology with input from the Royal College of Radiologists. Nonetheless, we note with interest the comment from Professor Wendy Reid, that “HEE is clear that multi-professional learning can deliver the best learning environments and remains committed to making the best appointment for all our Heads of Schools, recognising that different skills and knowledge can deliver excellent education and training to meet trainees’ and patients’ need in a modern NHS”.

No-one, not least the FSSA, doubts the value of multi professional learning. However, the FSSA consider that Heads of Schools training doctors should be senior front line medically qualified staff of the relevant specialty. This is what our patients would expect.

Professor John MacFie
President of the Federation of Surgical Specialty Associations

The FSSA comprises:

- The Association of Surgeons of Great Britain & Ireland (ASGBI)
- The British Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (BAOMS)
- The British Association of Otorhinolaryngology – Head & Neck Surgery (BAO-HNS)
- The British Association of Paediatric Surgeons (BAPS)
- The British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons (BAPRAS)
- The British Association of Urological Surgeons (BAUS)
- The British Orthopaedic Association (BOA)
- The Society for Cardiothoracic Surgery in Great Britain & Ireland (SCTS)
- The Society of British Neurological Surgeons (SBNS)
- The Vascular Society for Great Britain & Ireland (VS)