

College discussion comes to an end for BAA

I owe you as British Academy of Audiology members an explanation. It has been hard to write recently and try to make sense of some of the things I want to tell BAA members about conversations that are ongoing in our organisation and in the wider world of Audiology.

Over the last 12 months we have been slowly progressing conversations about The College of Audiology. Each time I start to write my own update for you I am told by the other organisation's leaders, who are involved, to not put it out. They believe that everything should come from the group and that the discussion should be with the leaders of the organisations.

I'm struggling to agree.

BAA Board and I have had many informal conversations with individual members and groups of BAA members over the last few months about the College discussions. These conversations are not recorded but they are listened to and are discussed at Board level, at meetings and by email.

I don't think we have made a secret of the fact that BAA Board feel the time is right to collaborate with other professional bodies in Audiology and BSA as our learned society. We are clear that a College of Audiology should be for the good of the people we serve and by working together we will strengthen the voice of Audiology professionals. A College would represent individual professionals in Audiology and not our employers, be they NHS or private.

On 4th October, a meeting was held with a group of interested clinicians and representatives from some of the key stakeholders in the wider audiology community. I think those at the meeting expected to discuss more concrete plans of what a college would do but we are not there yet.

We agree that:

- A college must be set up to be beneficial to the people we serve in all areas of Audiology not just adult hearing care.
- That a college must produce evidence-based guidance and opinion for all of Audiology in the UK.
- That a college should be a charity and abide by charity governance rules.

These are pretty good starting points but there are many things we don't have agreed and some of these include:

- Exactly who should be at the table in the early and later stages of the College discussions.
- Who can be a member of a College of Audiology?
- What would BAA look like if a college formed?

It's become clear to me, and to most of BAA Board, that the way to take this forward is to consider the best interests of our own members first, as that is who we represent. Our members predominantly work for the health services across the Home Countries.

We don't believe that looking at the governance and functions of a college with a lobbying organisation who represent business interests and not individual audiology professionals is appropriate.

BSHAA, BSA, AIHHP and BAA all represent single professionals. We believe these are the organisations that should take the next steps in developing the College and that all other organisations are stakeholders in the process and should be consulted when appropriate plans are in place and our organisations memberships have had chance to comment on those plans.

The college is not and should never be set up to battle NHS and private provision, both are vital for good Audiology provision in the UK. The College should always help all professionals in Audiology and hearing care to deliver an evidence-based service.

There will be times you or I don't agree with a College decision but the good governance we aim to develop will ensure that the only interests served by the College relate to good quality care.

In order to move forward with the next steps in exploring a College of Audiology we need to be comfortable that a College will represent our values as an organisation and those people that are part of the development also share those values.

This is not personality driven, a stand for old fashioned tribalism or poor governance on behalf of BAA. This is a line BAA leadership, after conversation with members, has decided to draw. BAA will no longer participate in discussions about the formation of a College of Audiology with NCHA.

NCHA is an organisation funded by big business, with no direct representation of individual audiologists in those businesses. Their involvement should, in BAA Board's opinion, be confined to that of a stakeholder and we are asking them to leave the discussion of structure and governance until such time that other stakeholders are included and consulted in the process.

BAA have today said that we will not continue the discussions of a College of Audiology in the current format and we have for now walked away from any further meetings.

Sue Falkingham
BAA President