

## **The GPDF Chair's Response to LMC listserver debate regarding the GPDF survey on national LMC conferences**

There have been a number of recent contributions to the LMC listserver following publication of an independent survey commissioned by the GPDF to gather LMC opinion on national LMC conferences. As I said I would, I am responding fully to the comments made.

It is worth stating at the outset that as a company the GPDF is bound by The Companies Act 2006 and the directors are at personal risk should they not act responsibly. The directors fully understand their fiduciary duties to use the resources provided by LMCs wisely and the importance of ensuring national representation of GPs within an affordable financial envelope. We understand our responsibilities.

### **Listening and engaging directly with LMCs**

As part of the transformation of the GPDF into an LMC led organisation, LMCs have rightly demanded value for money and for efficiencies where possible. Ensuring national representation, which is at the heart of what we do, requires LMCs to continue their contribution but in the past, a small minority of LMCs stopped remitting some or all of the annual Quota and others threatened to do so. This, more than anything, threatened the very existence of the GPDF as a going concern and as a result, national representation as we all know it.

I have stated repeatedly that the GPDF has listened and will engage directly with LMCs to understand their needs and preferences, which is the reason that independent, detailed research was commissioned.

### **Our initial research platform**

The initial research sought views regarding the GPDF, the BMA and its GPCs. The feedback received formed the basis of a series of workshops for LMCs in the autumn of 2018. Despite claims to the contrary, the output of the workshops and research has been shared with LMCs.

In addition to making clear LMC views regarding the GPDF, the research and workshops revealed support for three main areas of activity; national representation, national LMC conferences and support for LMCs.

### **A more detailed understanding**

Despite this generally positive response, there was criticism and a lack of support for some elements of the topics considered. In order to understand these concerns in more detail, further surveys of LMCs were planned with questionnaires informed directly by the comments made in this LMC feedback.

At first, we undertook a detailed survey regarding national representation. This has been completed and the feedback shared with the GPC Executives and the BMA as part of the ongoing discussions regarding the grant to be provided by the GPDF, and the research findings

will be presented to GPC UK at its September meeting. Finally, this will all feed into the workshops planned for LMCs in September this year.

Secondly, a detailed survey regarding national LMC conferences has been implemented. We plan to offer to present the feedback to conference chairs and their deputies and then again to feed the information into the workshops planned for LMCs.

### **Addressing survey criticisms**

This conference survey triggered listserver contributions from a minority of individuals who have seen the survey, including current or past Chairs, Deputy Chairs and members of agenda committees.

Postings have claimed poor leadership and included words such as: *'disappointed, snide, undermining, divisive, inflammatory, non-sensical, adversarial, confrontational, patronising, criticising, insulting, unprofessional, antagonistic, offensive and unacceptable'*. There have also been serious allegations made about the motives and actions of the GPDF directors.

These allegations may be personally wounding, inappropriate, unjustified or indeed defamatory. They may not be. Others can judge for themselves.

To be frank, I am struggling to reconcile meetings and conversations that I had with representatives regarding the planned survey about LMC conferences with allegations of no consultation.

Nor can I reconcile feedback regarding the questionnaire from certain individuals from whom we sought input and their subsequent comments to the listserver. I intend to resolve matters directly with the individuals concerned but I shall afford them the courtesy of not broadcasting those issues on this listserver. Likewise, where individuals have made allegations, or comments that have crossed the line of acceptability, then I prefer other avenues of communication and resolution.

No one was intentionally ignored. I chose to consult with representative individuals to seek their views on the proposed questionnaire. My decision was to consult the Chair of UK conference of LMCs to get a Chair's view. I felt it unnecessary to consult every chair and deputy chair of every LMC conference.

In addition, I have been concerned by the view expressed to me that sessional GPs lack a proper voice at LMC conference. I therefore chose to consult with those involved at a senior level concerned with wider issues of representation and those concerned with the voice of sessional GPs. If the GPDF is paying a grant to ensure the national representation of general practitioners, then I want to know if all GPs do indeed feel represented. My intentions were honourable.

The feedback from the Chair suggested some changes and also questioned, in view of the change to the timing of conferences, whether the survey may be a little premature. The feedback from representation was positive and suggested an addition. The sessional feedback questioned the remit of the GPDF in conference matters with no suggested changes.

The feedback was not ignored. On reflection I could have responded immediately to the concern raised by my sessional colleague regarding the remit of the GPDF.

### **Clear remit for the GPDF**

The GPDF is clear as to its role. It does not, and has never claimed to have, any place in the structure and content of LMC conferences

However, LMCs do provide funding of £0.5 million per year. As such, the GPDF will not abrogate its responsibilities as the custodian of LMC contributions.

We need to ensure it is an appropriate use of Quota payers' money and indeed the GPDF has a responsibility to consult with LMCs to ascertain whether they feel they are receiving value for the cost of conferences.

LMCs have repeatedly made it clear they expect value for money.

The GPDF has evolved as an organisation in recent years, and as an independent company, our Board has both the right and the legal duty to ensure that the funds provided by LMCs, are used appropriately, wisely, and in line with the wishes of LMCs.

### **Wording of the survey**

There have been comments related to the wording of the questions within the survey.

The survey was based on a professional and independent approach, developed by an experienced and highly qualified market research specialist. It was not biased or flawed in structure. The questionnaire contained a classic 'attitude bank' structure.

These statements were not the view of the GPDF, but rather an exploration of issues which have been mentioned previously by LMCs. Participants were requested to select the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement.

Across the attitude bank questions – 14 statements were positively worded, 12 were negatively worded, and 26 were neutrally worded. This mix of positive/negative/neutral is essential to ensure that there is no bias, and to ensure respondents think carefully at each statement before deciding whether to agree or disagree. If they were all positively worded, then it could be accused of 'leading'. The suggestion that we ask again in order to obtain the answer we want is simply not the case.

After re-calling the reminder to complete the survey we had intended to reissue it.

However, thanks to the strong levels of participation we have received from LMCs in response to the initial invitation to take part in the survey, we were able to proceed with the final analysis/report such that it was not necessary to reissue the survey. The unedited findings will be offered to the Chairs and Vice Chairs of conferences and discussed at the workshops we are holding in September (Note: there are places still available in London, Manchester and Glasgow).

## **In conclusion**

I am aware that some continue to see the GPDF as fair game and, whether deliberately or out of ignorance, choose to ignore the responsibility that the GPDF has to its LMC members. I have been shocked by the tone of some of the language used to criticise the GPDF. Are we not all supposed to be on the same side and working for the benefit of General Practice?

I am still incredulous at the initial reaction and subsequent furore created by a minority in response to the survey. Nevertheless, I am always prepared to reflect on potential improvements.

As a result of the sensitivities that have emerged, perhaps there would have been merit in providing advance warning of the survey with a more thorough explanation as to the GPDF motives. Forgive me for not anticipating the ire of some.

However, the GPDF is going to continue to transform as an LMC led organisation. Since being elected Chair, I have delivered much of what was asked. I refer you to our website and recent newsletters for details of what LMCs asked for and what the GPDF is delivering. I accept the responsibilities given to me.

We will not be swayed from what we consider to be the right course of action for this organisation and the LMCs we serve.

As such, we will continue to consult with LMCs who entrust their constituent GPs' money to the GPDF. Independent research is a way of balancing the views of all LMCs and dilutes the influence of any vocal minority.

We are very aware that our actions may not please all LMCs, nor indeed all individuals with an interest in GPDF's activity, all of the time, but please be assured they are always genuinely motivated

Research on how the GPDF can better support LMCs will form the basis of the next survey as planned.

I am grateful to those who have contacted me off list, and indeed I understand why you chose to do so, offering your support to me personally and for what the GPDF is trying to deliver for LMCs. At a challenging time, this is very much appreciated.

Should anyone ever feel the need to raise any matter regarding the GPDF then I am happy to receive e-mails, calls to my mobile or indeed arrange to meet. My contact details are:

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