

HFMA UPDATE

Martin Last, Director General



Business as usual?



It feels like business as usual again now that Parliament has returned from summer recess and starts to implement several initiatives which may impact our industry. After a relatively quiet schedule in the first half of 2025, it is anticipated that things are about to get much busier.

Following Lord Darzi's investigation into the NHS in July, the Government announced its 10-year plan to rebuild the NHS for the future by tackling immediate crises and implementing long-term reforms. Key proposals included cutting waiting lists, strengthening primary care through more GPs and Neighbourhood Health Centres, and addressing workforce shortages with improved training and staff relations. Significant emphasis has been placed on modernising the NHS through digital transformation and shifting to a preventative health model, which may benefit the role of improving nutrition and the need for food supplements.

The 10-year plan contains key policy issues which, along with NHS reorganisation and social care reform will see financial funding shift from hospital to community services. We are already seeing adoption of AI and new technologies to improve

efficiencies, and the use of medicines and treatments will be revamped to use greater robot technologies by 2026. We have also seen Government announcements on a more interventionist approach than previously in the way food and drink advertising, formulations and sales channels may change, with the aim for this to be implemented through cooperation and consultation with industry.

The plan will see more effort to deal with obesity and diet, to support the creation of the 'healthiest generation' and tackle obesity rates. An objective also highlighted through the initial findings of the HFMA Health of The Nation survey, conducted this summer, which reflects that 57 per cent of people believe taking supplements is more important during a diet and weight loss regime. Equally important is the way a younger generation receive information and advice on health, where information on social media platforms and online influencers play a more important role now than for previous generations. The full survey launches this autumn.

There is no doubt the Government's 10-year plan is bold and there is overall

acceptance that it is required if the NHS is to survive, such is the need to modernise and deliver the changes it proposes. However, such plans have been made before, and their success will be determined by how it improves patient care and whether there are the resources to address current workforce shortages and changes. It is unlikely that change will become immediately evident moreover that we should see a gradual implementation which over time should start to show improvements.

Also over summer, we saw the UK EU Summit, the first summit since our departure from the EU, which established a renewed strategic partnership between the EU and UK and with a will to reaffirm common values and commitments. This commitment will seek to tackle strategic and geopolitical issues and welcomed the agreement on the EU-UK security and defence partnership, but that also extends over various areas. This includes a common understanding on sanitary and phytosanitary processes, which has direct impact on the Windsor framework and how EU law may be assimilated into UK practice, although with a positive goal to reduce bureaucracy, paperwork, and enable a freer movement of goods between borders.

The implementation of such changes will be subject to negotiations, and are intended to be fast tracked by government, with departments already issuing consultation reports to be completed by early September. It is anticipated by October, the outcomes of these consultations will provide the background for negotiation talks with EU, which will then be completed by year end for

provision into UK law in 2026. This assumes that agreement with the EU can be achieved on the varied and complex matters that will be affected.

The HFMA is working in collaboration with other UK trade associations to support and defend industry views. There are many issues to be resolved, such as which expert opinions and practices will take priority where there is possible divergence between these views. Of key concern would be the implementation of the EU proposed model for maximum levels of food supplements, which is generally regarded as not fit for purpose, in Europe and the UK.

And more recently, we have received the long-promised FSA consultation on CBD. The intention is to create a legal market for CBD foodstuffs and is now consulting with industry on recommendations to Ministers on how three novel food applications may be authorised and the effect on the existing public list. These products are the first to progress past the initial safety assessment stage and are linked to more than a third of the 8,147 validated products on the FSA's public list. HFMA will be engaging with this consultation representing members interests; the consultation period extends until November 22.

There is much for industry to grapple with, and it is the role of responsible trade associations to provide a voice to members and try and ensure a proportionate and workable regulatory and political platform on which to operate, on the many fronts that we face.

If you would like to know more about the benefits of membership, visit www.hfma.co.uk to learn more, or contact me on 020 8481 7100.