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Dear Bernie

I was very sorry to receive your letter of the 25th May withdrawing from the MTAS Review Group. Your decision was disappointing especially as your concerns have been discussed by the Review Group and solutions are being actively explored.

You raise two main issues.

The first is the high number of experienced Senior House Officers completing for a limited number of surgical training posts at the ST3 level. As you know this is a concern fully shared by the Review Group and one which also applies to physicians in training. You are concerned that the 200 extra training programmes announced last week for the next round remain unspecified in terms of specialty and location. However as you know the Review Group, including a representative of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, decided last Thursday, the day before your resignation letter, that a week should be taken to refine the allocation of the extra 200 posts so that trainee numbers and manpower needs could be appropriately balanced across all specialties. The Review Group also expressed the view that these ST3 posts needed to be supplemented by further posts in 2008 and 2009.

Your second issue is the need to allow selection for surgical specialty training posts to be made at the ST3 level. Last Thursday the Review Group and the Department of Health agreed to set up a working group to explore this issue and the wider one of flexibility in surgical training. As you know it was agreed that this group should be chaired by a surgeon of your choice and should comprise surgeons, surgical trainees and Postgraduate Deans and should liaise with the Postgraduate Medical Education and Training Board. I am disappointed this group has not been given time to deliver.

On behalf of the Review Group I would like to thank you and your deputy Professor Anthony Mundy for your enormous contributions to the workings of the Group over the last two and a half months and am sorry you felt unable to contribute to the remaining few days. I would also like to thank your Fellows for all the hard work they have put in to find the best candidates for surgical training posts in difficult circumstances.

Yours sincerely

Professor Neil Douglas MD DSc PRCPE
Chair – MTAS Review Group