THAMES VALLEY'S
HEALTH AND LIFE SCIENCES WORKING GROUP
Wednesday 21st February 2024

THAMES VALLEY
CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE
GROUP

ASK: To address issues faced by the Health and Life Sciences sector in the UK to ensure its global recognition in the field

Introduction

The Health and Life Sciences (HLS) sector in the UK faces both unprecedented challenges and opportunities that require attention in 2024 and beyond. As the world grapples with the rapid development of the sector, as well as its shortcomings, the UK government finds itself at the forefront of a crucial mission – to secure and strengthen the nation's position as a global leader in the HLS sphere.

This necessitates a comprehensive approach that aligns policies, investment, supporting talent development and fostering collaborative efforts, the UK can position itself to drive innovation, meet the evolving needs of the population and boost economic prosperity.

Our 6 key asks for the next government are:

ASK 1: Invest in the continued automation of the healthcare system

One of the key issues in the sector is the continuous need for automation in healthcare, with processes including medication packaging demanding a new manner of delivery. Automating these tasks could create more space for healthcare staff to focus on patient care, ultimately enhancing patient recovery. This includes investment in natural language processing programs for patient records and continued support of research into the use of robotics to reduce hospital stays.

ASK 2: Foster partnerships and network collaboration

Establishing networks and partnerships to drive pilot projects, including between academic institutions and hospitals (see University of Reading, Clinical Training Suite). Develop partnership platforms that focus on the optimal use of taxes, ensuring the best outcomes for both patients and clinicians. Shared contractual agreements to support clinicians and testing on wards. The existence of Health Innovation Networks is useful, but these are narrow pipes and there needs to be more dialogue regarding SME's access to the NHS, the gap between business and government wants and the capacity of the NHS etc.

ASK 3: Increase government support and funding

The recent commitment of £2 billion earmarked from the spending review for digitizing the NHS and social care sector is a positive step. However, ongoing collaboration between government, industry, and decision-makers is crucial for successful implementation of new practices, with more public spending on stimulating innovation, attracting talent which will in turn drive economic growth. Funding schemes need to be more attractive and transparent for investment decision makers.

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ASK 4: **Clarity regarding regulatory issues and market access**

Challenges in regulation, particularly in areas such as medical devices and UK REACH post Brexit pose a significant obstacle to the UK healthcare system, and addressing these complexities is imperative for sector growth. Additionally, continuing to pursue market access to new technologies faces challenges, with clinicians lacking the available 'headspace', hampering the trailing and adoption of innovative solutions.

ASK 5: **Addressing procurement challenges**

Procurement must shift from a focus solely on cost to an emphasis on performance and quality (more value-based procurement needed). Additionally, regulatory certainty, innovation access, and strategic partnerships with the NHS are vital for sector growth. Internal issues and regulation Additionally, current NHS procurement practices are resulting in products being withdrawn from the UK market – a reevaluation of the NHS procurement processes, internal barriers and developing existing technologies is needed.

ASK 6: **Navigating sustainability agenda**

There is an essential need for government to align their sustainability agenda alongside the needs of regulation and procurement in the NHS. Tax breaks and grants for companies investing in sustainable technologies/processes, fostering the development of green research, and reevaluating the current regulatory/procurement frameworks for the NHS to have more access to sustainable practices. Additionally, using technology to an advantage e.g., digital labelling/QR codes to reduce in-pack leaflets.