

Survey of the general public's views on NHS system reform in England

June 2007

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Background

The views of the general public were gathered to inform further development of the BMA discussion paper 'a rational way forward for the NHS in England: an alternative approach to health reforms'. The survey formed part of the BMA's wider consultation on the discussion paper and gathered evidence to find out what the general public views on themes within the discussion paper were.

Method

The opinions of the general public were collected in street interviews in three geographic areas in England. Following a preamble introducing a statement respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement. 200 interviews were conducted in the North (Leeds), 600 in London and the Home Counties and 200 in the South West (Dorset). The interviews were conducted between 4 and 12 June 2007. The questions can be found in appendix 1.

The percentages reported throughout this report are for illustrative purposes only and are not necessarily indicative of wider trends within the population.

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Funding the NHS

The BMA has consistently championed the founding principles of the NHS. At its 2006 annual representative meeting the BMA's representative body stated its belief that the NHS should provide care that is:

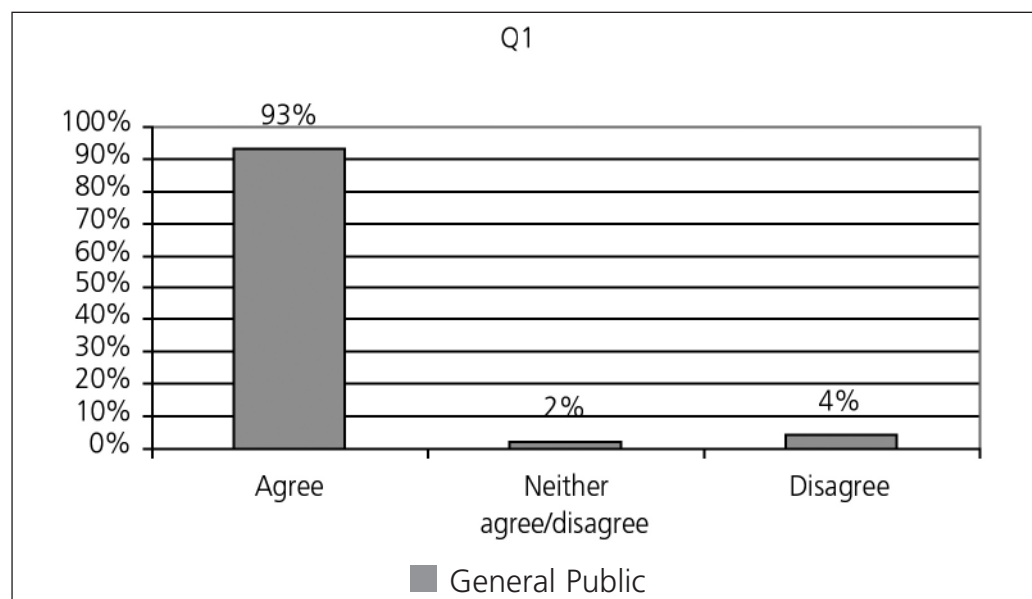
- free at the point of delivery
- ethically rationed by clinical priority
- equitably resourced
- funded from general taxation.

The 'rational way forward for the NHS in England' document states that the health service must continue to be funded from general taxation to provide care free at the point of use as an expression of its founding value of social solidarity.

Respondents were asked if the NHS should continue to be funded from UK taxes and remain free at point of use. 9 in 10 of the general public agreed or strongly agreed the NHS should continue to be funded from UK taxes and remain free at point of use.

Q1 The NHS should continue to be funded from UK taxes and remain free at point of use

	General Public	
	N	%
Strongly agree	496	49%
Agree	446	44%
Neither agree/disagree	23	2%
Disagree	35	3%
Strongly disagree	9	1%
Total	1009	100%



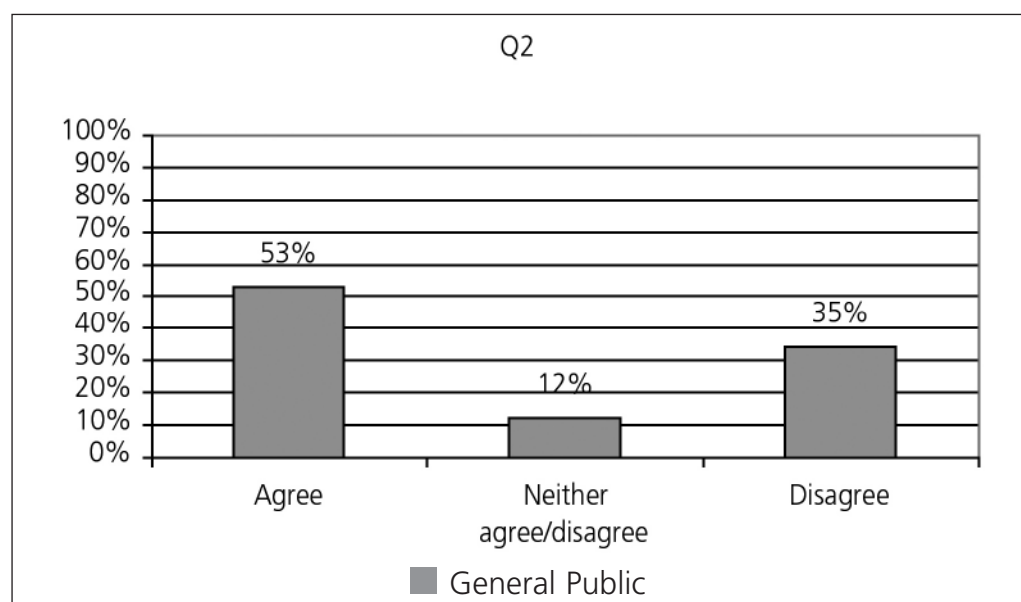
The 'rational way forward for the NHS in England' document suggests that maintaining the core values will continue to require the NHS to constantly manage a set of financial tensions and an increasing range of treatments and technology, rising public expectations and an ageing population will place pressure on available health resources. It is suggested that responding to these pressures will require hard social choices: whether to increase taxation or to set priorities on access to certain services.

Respondents were asked if the NHS should continue to be funded from UK taxes but, as resources are limited, it should be mostly free at the point of use and a small charge should be made for some services.

Over half of the general public agreed or strongly agreed the NHS should continue to be funded from UK taxes but, as resources are limited, it should be mostly free at the point of use and a small charge should be made for some services. The results suggest recognition of the limitation of resources and possibly the existing charges already in place as compared with the 'ideal model of funding' the NHS (question 1).

Q2 The NHS should continue to be funded from UK taxes but, as resources are limited, it should be mostly free at the point of use and a small charge should be made for some services

	General Public	
	N	%
Strongly agree	79	8%
Agree	457	45%
Neither agree/disagree	124	12%
Disagree	244	24%
Strongly disagree	105	10%
Total	1009	100%



Management of the NHS

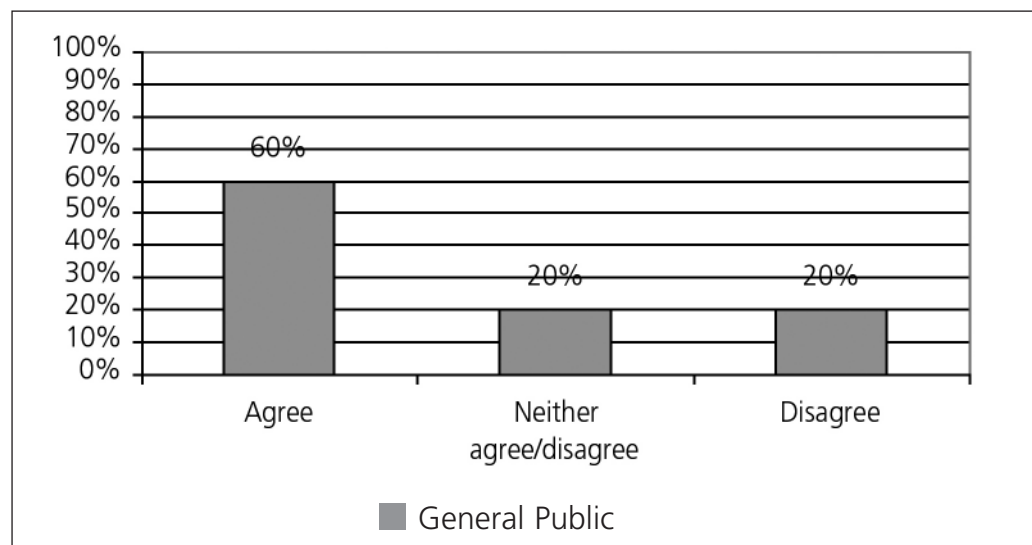
Recommendation 3 of the 'rational way forward for the NHS in England' document calls for the separation of national politics from the day-to-day running of the NHS. The BMA calls for an independent board of governors for the NHS established, appointed by and accountable to Parliament.

Respondents were asked if the NHS should be run through an independent board of governors which is appointed by and accountable to Parliament.

3 in 5 of the general public agreed or strongly agreed the NHS should be run through an independent board of governors which is appointed by and accountable to Parliament. 1 in 5 of the general public disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Q3 The NHS should be run through an independent board of governors which is appointed by and accountable to Parliament.

	General Public	
	N	%
Strongly agree	147	15%
Agree	455	45%
Neither agree/disagree	203	20%
Disagree	171	17%
Strongly disagree	33	3%
Total	1009	100%



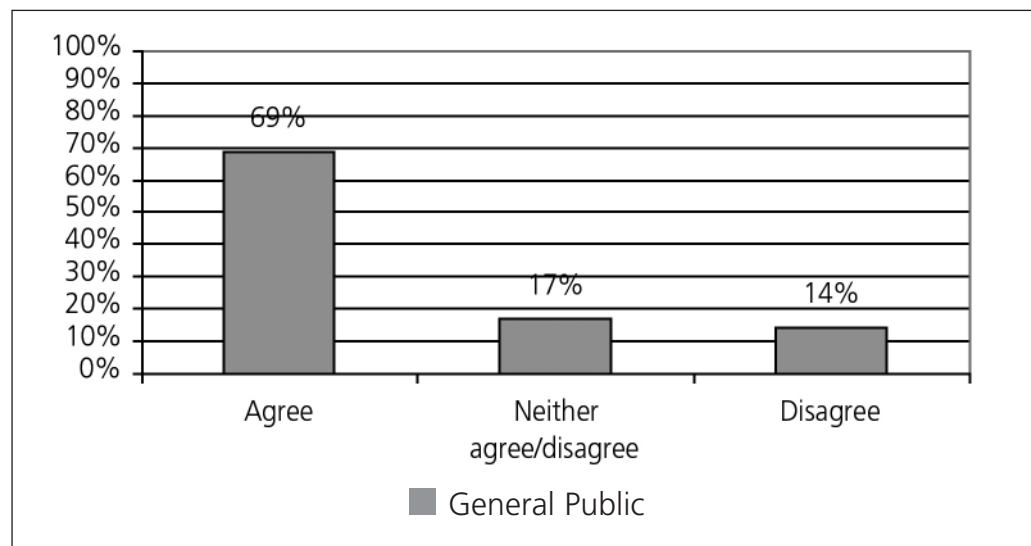
Recommendation 8 of the 'rational way forward for the NHS in England' document calls for greater autonomy for health professionals and managers to shape local services. Currently decisions about how to spend NHS money at the local level are made by Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), the document suggests that mechanisms to enable professionals to work together across boundaries will achieve coordinated development and effective delivery of services for patients.

Respondents were asked if they agree or disagree that to ensure that health needs of patients are met, decisions about local health services should be made by bodies elected by the local population.

7 in 10 of the general public agreed or strongly agreed that to ensure that health needs of patients are met, decisions about local health services should be made by bodies elected by the local population.

Q4 To ensure that health needs of patients are met, decisions about local health services should be made by bodies elected by the local population

	General Public	
	N	%
Strongly agree	144	14%
Agree	549	54%
Neither agree/disagree	173	17%
Disagree	126	12%
Strongly disagree	17	2%
Total	1009	100%



Practice based commissioning

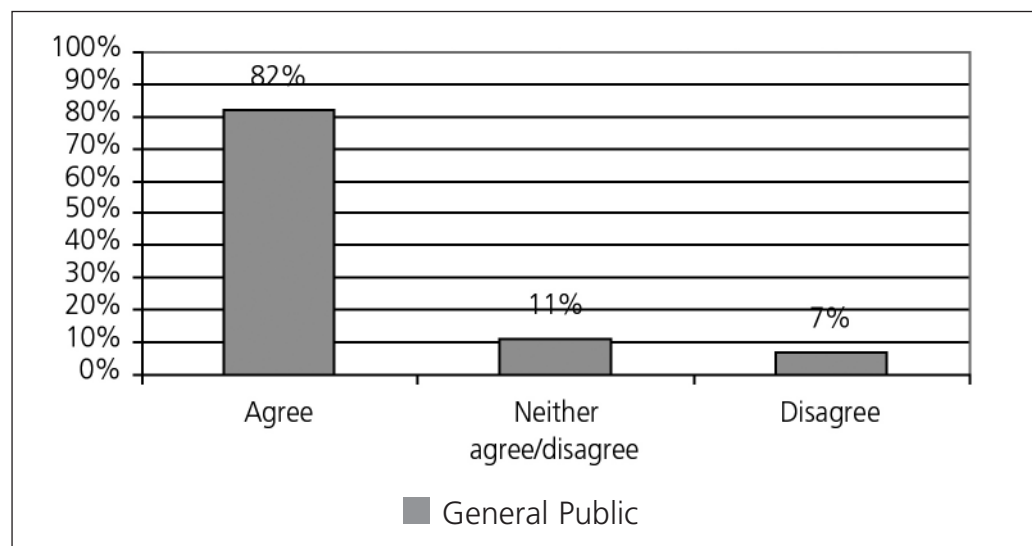
Recommendation 10 of the 'rational way forward for the NHS in England' document calls for a more mature form of commissioning to diminish the need for a purchaser-provider split.

The general public were asked a question on practice based commissioning.

4 in 5 of the general public agreed or strongly agreed that doctors should have a major input into deciding how money is spent in the NHS locally and what is best for their patients.

Q5 Doctors should have a major input into deciding how money is spent in the NHS locally and what is best for their patients

	General Public	
	N	%
Strongly agree	307	30%
Agree	521	52%
Neither agree/disagree	111	11%
Disagree	60	6%
Strongly disagree	10	1%
Total	1009	100%



Priority setting

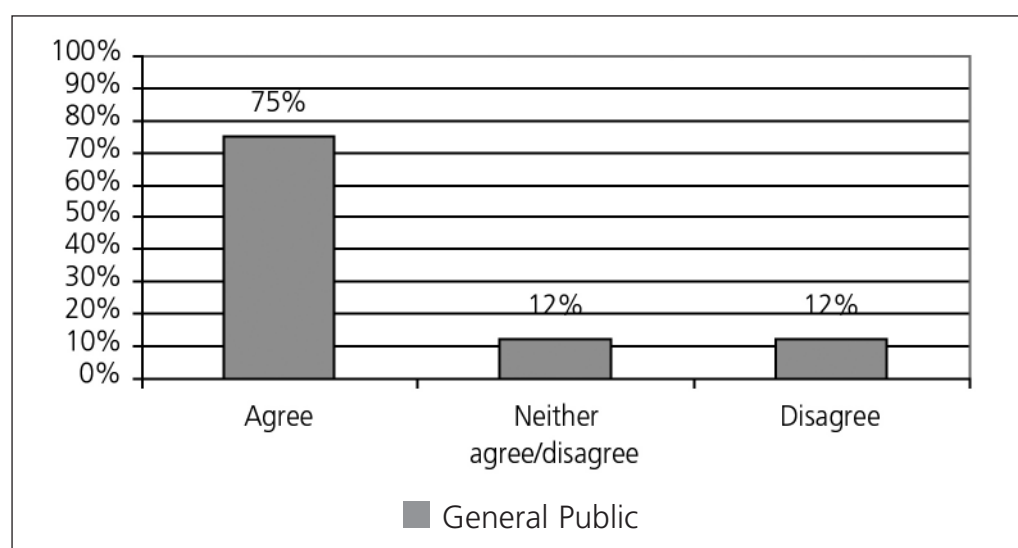
Recommendation 2 of the 'rational way forward for the NHS in England' suggests that while the NHS should provide a comprehensive range of services, priority setting and, therefore rationing is inevitable, if an equitable approach within limited resources is to be retained. Recommendation 2 also calls for these limitations to be acknowledged by politicians so that the right environment will exist for politicians, health professionals and the public to debate and decide upon a process to define a list of nationally agreed NHS services that will be available.

The general public were asked if they agreed or disagreed that all areas of the country must provide the same set of nationally agreed NHS services to all patients even if some treatments or medicines are not included.

Over 3 in 4 of the general public agreed or strongly agreed that all areas of the country must provide the same set of nationally agreed NHS services to all patients even if some treatments or medicines are not included.

Q6 All areas of the country must provide the same set of nationally agreed NHS services to all patients even if some treatments or medicines are not included

	General Public	
	N	%
Strongly agree	214	21%
Agree	546	54%
Neither agree/disagree	125	12%
Disagree	110	11%
Strongly disagree	14	1%
Total	1009	100%



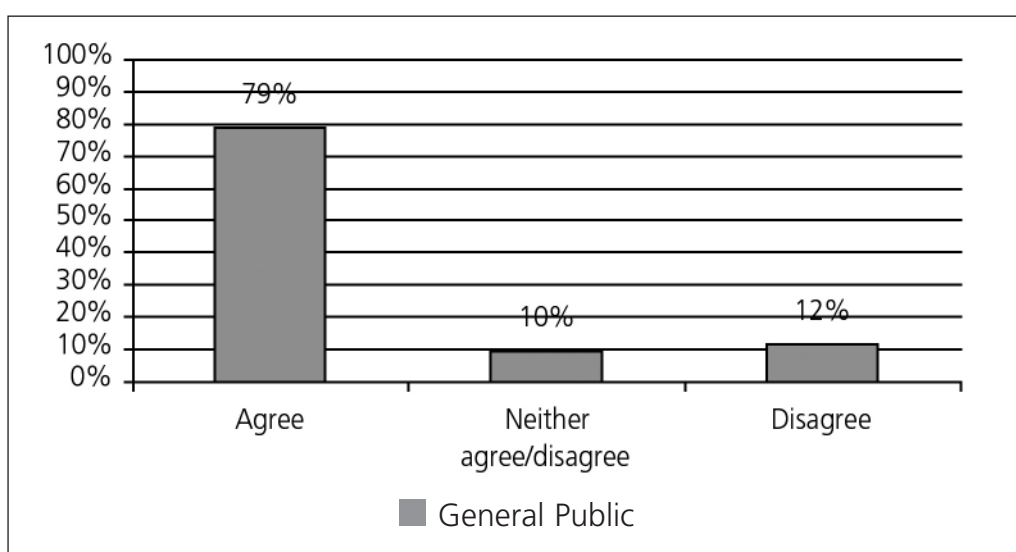
Recommendation 2 of the 'rational way forward for the NHS in England' suggests that if a defined list of agreed NHS services is developed the approach should be national and explicit, setting priorities for the whole service. It is also recommended that there should be an ongoing mechanism to review and change priorities in the NHS, which must include an effective way of incorporating public and patient views.

Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed that all areas of the country must provide a set of nationally agreed NHS services to all patients and local areas can provide additional services to their patients if funding allows.

Almost 3 in 4 of the general public agreed or strongly agreed that all areas of the country must provide a set of nationally agreed NHS services to all patients and local areas can provide additional services to their patients if funding allows.

Q7 All areas of the country must provide a set of nationally agreed NHS services to all patients and local areas can provide additional services to their patients if funding allows

	General Public	
	N	%
Strongly agree	167	17%
Agree	627	62%
Neither agree/disagree	96	10%
Disagree	103	10%
Strongly disagree	16	2%
Total	1009	100%



The general public were slightly more in favour of question 6: 'all areas of the country providing the same set of nationally agreed NHS services to all patients *even if some treatments or medicines are not included*' (75%) than question 7: 'all areas of the country providing a set of nationally agreed NHS services to all patients *and local areas can provide additional services to their patients if funding allows*' (79%).

The role of the private sector

The BMA is opposed to privatisation of the NHS. Recommendation 11 of the 'rational way forward for the NHS in England' states that private sector provision should only be commissioned where there is no NHS capacity to provide the service. The recommendation argues:

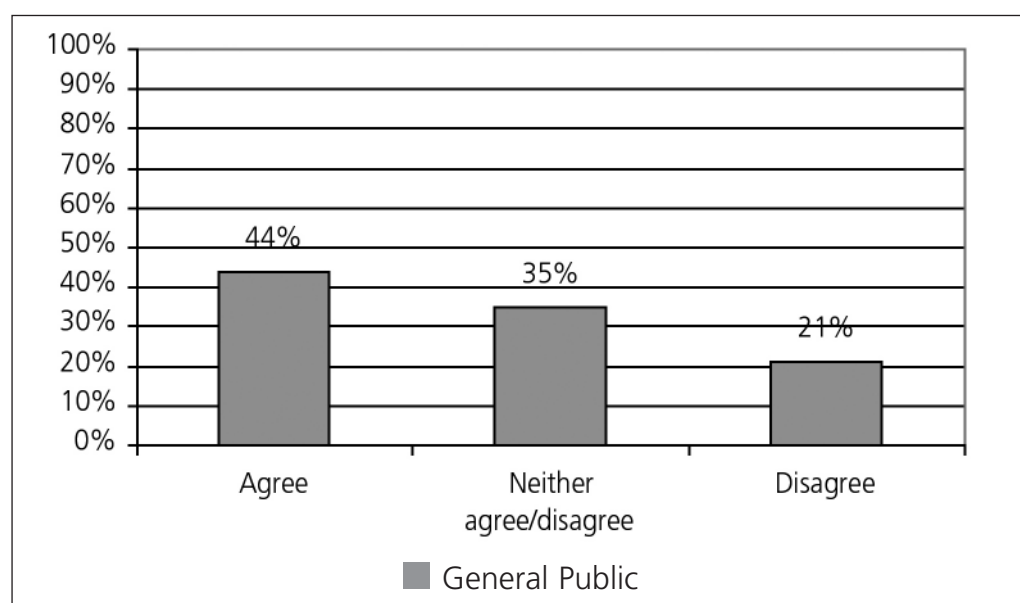
- there is no evidence that the private sector offers improved services or better value for money than the NHS,
- there should be no further central procurement of private sector provision, and
- the private sector should support the NHS rather than be seen to be supplanting it.

The general public were asked three questions (8, 9 and 10) about the role of the private sector in the NHS. The first question sought views on existing involvement of the private sector, the second involvement where there is a need or gap and the third unlimited involvement of the private sector.

The general public were asked if there is already too much involvement of private organisations in the provision of NHS services. 2 in 5 of the general public agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Q8 There is already too much involvement of private organisations in the provision of NHS services

	General Public	
	N	%
Strongly agree	157	16%
Agree	288	29%
Neither agree/disagree	351	35%
Disagree	192	19%
Strongly disagree	21	2%
Total	1009	100%



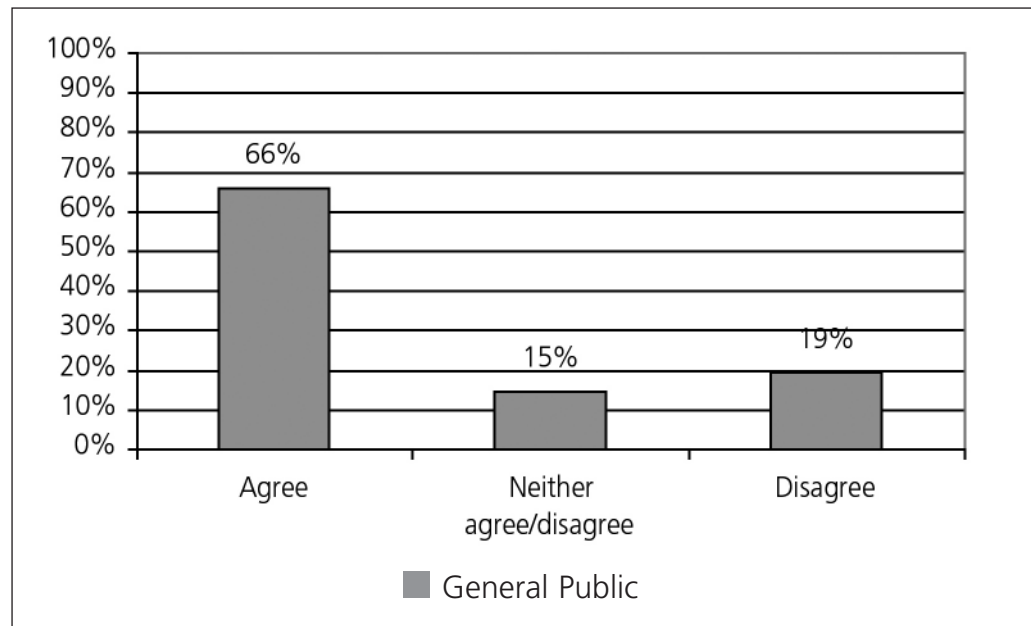
The general public were asked if private organisations should be allowed to provide NHS care only where there is an identified need or gap.

2 in 3 of the general public agreed or strongly agreed that private organisations should be allowed to provide NHS care only where there is an identified need or gap.

1 in 5 of the general public disagreed or strongly disagreed that private organisations should be allowed to provide NHS care only where there is an identified need or gap.

Q9 Private organisations should be allowed to provide NHS care only where there is an identified need or gap

	General Public	
	N	%
Strongly agree	99	10%
Agree	565	56%
Neither agree/disagree	149	15%
Disagree	177	18%
Strongly disagree	19	2%
Total	1009	100%

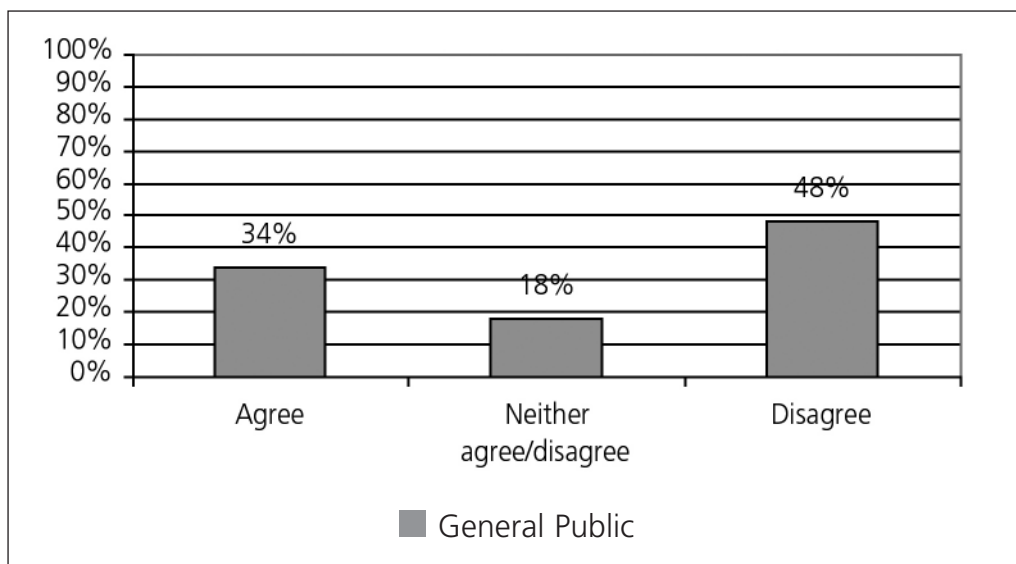


The general public were asked if private organisations should be allowed to provide unlimited NHS care.

3 in 10 of the general public agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Nearly half of the general public disagreed or strongly disagreed that private organisations should be allowed to provide unlimited NHS care.

Q10 Private organisations should be allowed to provide unlimited NHS care

	General Public	
	N	%
Strongly agree	74	7%
Agree	269	27%
Neither agree/disagree	182	18%
Disagree	325	32%
Strongly disagree	159	16%
Total	1009	100%



Improving quality through competition

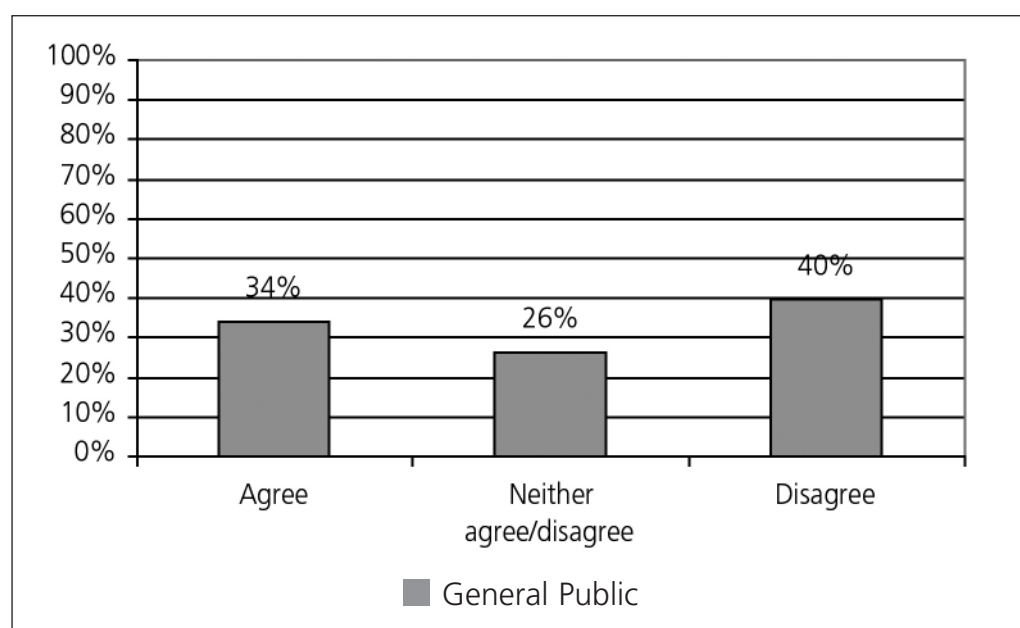
In all the recommendations made in the 'rational way forward for the NHS in England' document, the BMA's proposals begin from a desire to move forward from the current position to a more sustainable one, where health professionals, supported by managers, are able to work together to shape local health services to improve patient care. The recommendations suggest that greater flexibility over commissioning was required, both to better relate the different levels of commissioning within the system and to allow greater professional collaboration.

The general public were asked a question on the purchaser/provider split whereby local NHS organisations buy the health services patients use from hospitals.

2 in 5 of the general public disagreed or strongly disagreed that the present arrangements enable competition between hospitals which improves the quality of health services for patients.

Q11 The present arrangements enable competition between hospitals which improves the quality of services for patients

	General Public	
	N	%
Strongly agree	41	4%
Agree	301	30%
Neither agree/disagree	265	26%
Disagree	343	34%
Strongly disagree	59	6%
Total	1009	100%

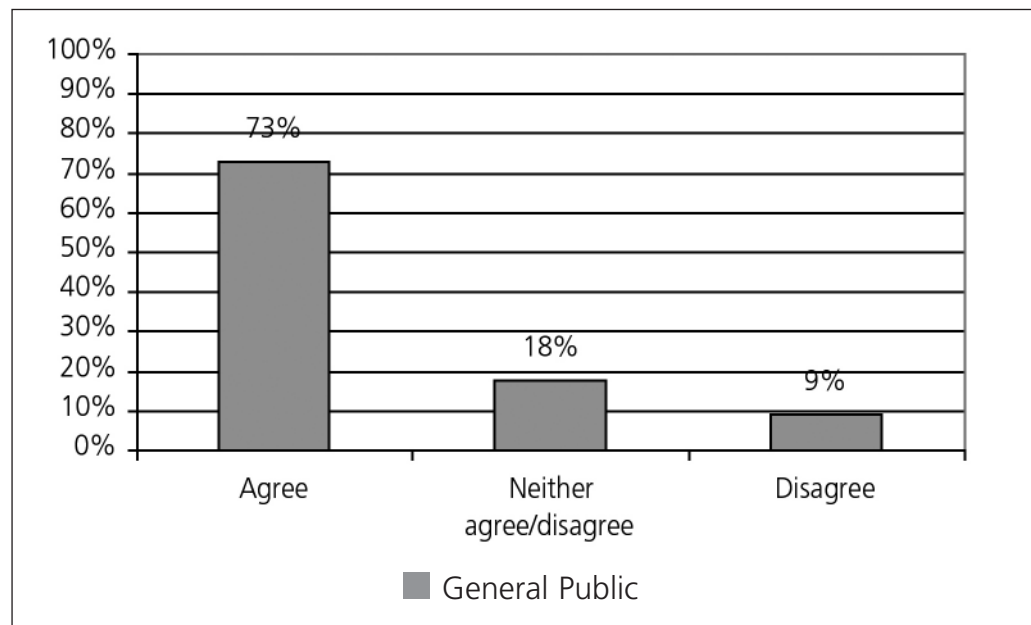


The general public were asked if a system where hospitals are funded and run by the same organisation would allow for collaboration and be better for delivering local health services for patients.

7 in 10 of the general public agreed or strongly agreed that a system where hospitals are funded and run by the same organisation would allow for collaboration and be better for delivering local health services for patients.

Q12 A system where hospitals are funded and run by the same organisation would allow for collaboration and be better for delivering local health services for patients

	General Public	
	N	%
Strongly agree	133	13%
Agree	604	60%
Neither agree/disagree	179	18%
Disagree	84	8%
Strongly disagree	9	1%
Total	1009	100%



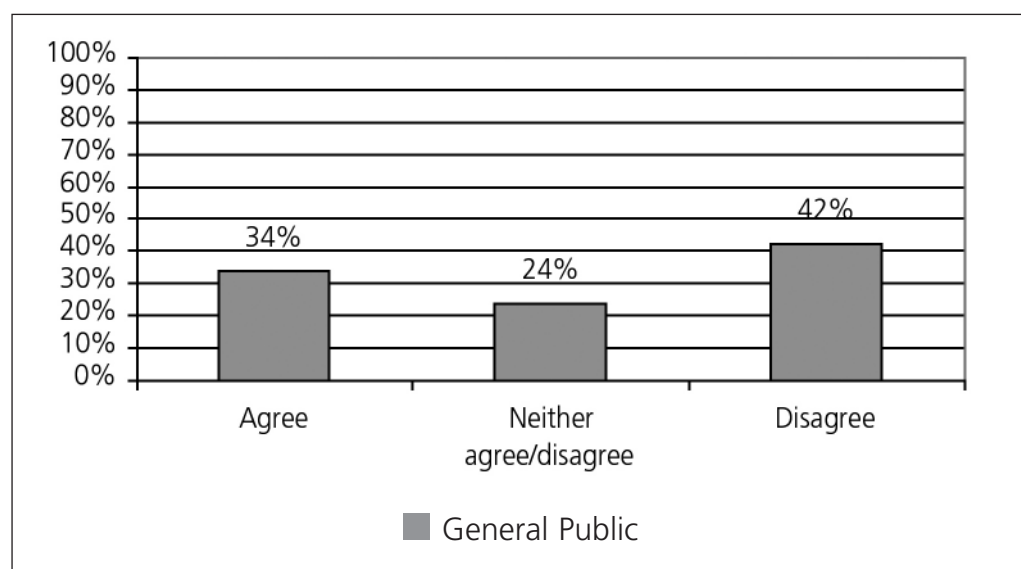
System reform

The NHS has experienced many changes its structure, funding and workforce since 1997 when new Labour came to power. The general public were asked if the changes to the NHS in the past ten years had succeeded in making the NHS better for patients.

Nearly 1 in 3 of the general public agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. 2 in 5 of the general public disagreed or strongly disagreed that the changes to the NHS in the past ten years have succeeded in making the NHS better for patients.

Q13 The changes to the NHS in the past ten years have succeeded in making the NHS better for patients

	General Public	
	N	%
Strongly agree	43	4%
Agree	299	30%
Neither agree/disagree	241	24%
Disagree	295	29%
Strongly disagree	131	13%
Total	1009	100%



Appendix 1

Questions for general public respondents

Respondent Number:

1. Currently the NHS is funded from UK taxes and provides healthcare free at the point of use.

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Q.1 The NHS should continue to be funded from UK taxes and remain free at point of use.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree Agree
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Q.2 The NHS should continue to be funded from UK taxes but, as resources are limited, it should be mostly free at the point of use and a small charge should be made for some services.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree Agree
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2. The Secretary of State for Health [currently Patricia Hewitt] is responsible for the running of the NHS. It has been suggested that to reduce political involvement in the NHS, day-to-day running of the NHS could be through an independent board of governors appointed by and answerable to Parliament.

Q.3 The NHS should be run through an independent board of governors which is appointed by and accountable to Parliament.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree Agree
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3. Currently decisions about how to spend NHS money at the local level are made by Primary Care Trusts (PCTs). It has been suggested that involving locally elected bodies in the process could be a fairer way of achieving this for patients.

Q.4 To ensure that health needs of patients are met; decisions about local health services should be made by bodies elected by the local population.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree Agree
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4. It has been suggested that if doctors were more involved in decision making on NHS services this would result in better services for patients.

Q.5 Doctors should have major input into deciding how money is spent on the NHS locally and what is best for their patients.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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5. The services that the NHS can deliver to patients are limited by available resources. With limited resources, priority setting and the rationing of some care may become necessary.

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Q.6 All areas of the country must provide the same set of nationally agreed NHS services to all patients even if some treatments or medicines are not included.

[Interviewer note: if asked the 'set of NHS services' can be described as 'the majority of services currently provided by the NHS']

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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Q.7 All areas of the country must provide a set of nationally agreed NHS services to all patients and local areas can provide additional services to their patients if funding allows.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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6. Although the NHS is a public organisation, private companies do provide some services which are free to the patient. These private services currently include NHS walk-in centres.

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Q.8 There is already too much involvement of private organisations in the provision of NHS services.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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Q.9 Private organisations should be allowed to provide NHS care only where there is an identified need or gap.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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Q.10 Private organisations should be allowed to provide unlimited NHS care.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree Agree
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7. Local NHS organisations [called Primary Care Trusts, PCTs] buy the health services you use as a patient from hospitals. Another way of doing this might be for these NHS organisations to run the hospitals themselves.

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Q.11 The present arrangements enable competition between hospitals which improves the quality of health services for patients.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree Agree
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Q.12 A system where hospitals are funded and run by the same organisation, which allows for collaboration would be better for delivering local health services for patients.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree Agree
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8. The NHS has experienced many changes to its structure, funding and workforce in the past decade.

Q.13 The changes to the NHS in the past ten years have succeeded in making the NHS better for patients.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree Agree
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