

What they are saying about the White Paper

The British coalition government's controversial new White Paper outlining sweeping changes in England's National Health Service is receiving mixed reviews from various commentators and interest groups.

Carillion, which has contracts for Private Finance Initiative hospitals and outsourcing was "excited", Virgin-owned private healthcare provider Assura Medical's chief executive was "enthusiastic".

Healthinvestor magazine has also eagerly embraced the white paper, which it argues "offers the private sector a raft of opportunities in the healthcare market by enabling patients to achieve greater choice and control over their treatment and care through access to any willing provider".

Pulse magazine, responding to FAQs warns that: "The White Paper will lead to huge new opportunities for private companies, with firms such as UnitedHealth, Tribal, Bupa and Harmoni already offering to run commissioning and accountancy services and back-office functions for GP consortiums."

The NHS Alliance welcomed the white paper as a "unique opportunity for frontline GPs", and Dr Michael Dixon of the Alliance has issued a rather desperate appeal for GPs not to turn their backs on the government proposals, claiming that it would be "utterly disastrous" if they did not "embrace the white paper and make it work."

The National Association of Primary Care has also said it was "vital that primary care clinicians embrace the new world open heartedly".

The Royal College of General Practitioners declared before the white paper was even published that it was the "right direction of travel": but its chair-elect Clare Gerada said "For most GPs, it's like rabbits in the headlights. There is also a natural disinclination to working with external organisations, for fear of going to the dark side and being part of the privatisation agenda.'

Right wing think tank Civitas warned that the upheaval could disrupt plans to drive through £20 billion in "efficiency savings". Stressed the "scant evidence base" for Lansley's plans, Civitas argued they could set the entire NHS back by at least a year, and "any slight blip will mean one thing for patients: a return to rationing, either by waiting or by reductions in services."

The Conservative Party's Bow Group, the oldest centre-right think tank in Britain, claims key strands of the reforms are unfeasible and risk creating a postcode lottery of healthcare.

The Nuffield Trust has warned that the reforms "will require significant management expertise to implement smoothly," and that "There is a huge risk that this level of reform cannot be implemented without major failure".

The centre right Social Market Foundation condemned the changes as "at best a waste of time, at worst a waste of money", warning that ill-prepared GPs could wind up outgunned and outmanoeuvred by powerful hospital Trusts.

The normally docile Patients' Association said that the changes are "a huge experiment without much hard evidence about how they will work in the NHS".

UNISON, the biggest public sector trade union, has taken the government to court, challenging moves to implement the proposals before they are even debated in Parliament and while the "consultation" with the public is not yet concluded.

Unite, Britain's biggest union, has also opposed the proposals, and set up a campaign committee.

The BMA's National Council has voted heavily in favour of "critical engagement" with the consultation process, although it has not formally spelled out its reservations, or identified any issues which might persuade its negotiators to pull out if not resolved.

Former Health Secretary Andy Burnham, trying to kick-start his leadership bid in the Labour Party, has correctly branded the Lansley proposals as "Without doubt the most dangerous threat to the NHS in its 62-year history: a recipe to turn order into chaos, a fair service into a free-for-all, and to let market forces run riot. For patients, it means longer waits in A&E, months on waiting lists and a postcode lottery writ large."