Open letter to Matthew Gould and Simon Eccles on steps to get CCIO on every NHS board

Dear Matthew and Simon,

The NHS Long Term Plan centred many of its aspirations on digital transformation, within everything from primary care to outpatient services. One of the key milestones listed in the plan was for every local NHS organisation to appoint either a chief clinical information officer (CIO) or chief clinical information officer (CCIO) to its board by 2021/22.

The CCIO and CIO Networks, communities of local NHS CCIOs and CIOs, strongly back and welcome the Long Term Plan's very clear recognition of the importance of board level digital leadership to achieve digitally-enabled modernisation of health services.

The LTP target is an important further recognition of the critical importance of developing, promoting and empowering digital leaders across the health service in order to achieve ambitious modernisation objectives.

However, a very significant amount of work that will be required to enable this to be achieved over the next 27 months. Below we set out a draft suggested plan of action for he steps we believe are needed for this objective to be met.

Anecdotal evidence from network members suggests that there are currently between 10-20 CCIOs and CIOs working across the English NHS who sit on the main executive board of their organisation, primarily from provider trusts. This against the total of around 250 provider trusts, plus CCGs, STPs and ICSs and arms-length bodies and agencies.

We believe a concerted programme of support and investment is therefore now required to develop senior NHS CCIO and CIOs and similar who can provide board-level digital leadership.

The 2016 report of the National Advisory Group on Health Information Technology in England, led by Dr Robert Wachter, recommended significant investment (1% of the £4.2 billion allocated to digitisation) in developing 'a workforce of trained clinical informaticists at trusts and giving them appropriate resources and authority'.

The NHS has not yet invested at close to the level recommended by the Wachter Review. The establishment of the NHS Digital Academy, and its provision of post-graduate diploma training for 300 staff over three years, has been a very welcome development but is not sufficient of itself.

We believe the following steps are required to ensure that the presence of high calibre CCIOs and CIOs on every NHS board becomes a reality over the next 27 months. We recognise that this is a significant package of investment in leadership cadre but feel this is essential to achieve the step-change in clinical informatics leadership envisaged by Wachter and now the Long Term Plan.

Getting CCIOs/CIOs onto the board recommended plan of action:

1. **NHSx CEO to write to all NHS board chairs**

   NHSx chief executive to write to all NHS board chairs asking what their plans are to appoint a CCIO/CIO to their board as its digital leader and what support they require.

2. Establish a Digital Leadership for Board members programme

Develop and implement a dedicated Digital Leadership for Boards programme – in-person and virtual – partnering with existing providers of senior health executive education such as the Kings Fund, NHS Providers, NHS Confederation, NHS Leadership Academy

3. Expand NHS Digital Academy

Building on the initiative already in place expand the number and range of places offered through the NHS Digital Academy.

4. Develop a dedicated Nye Bevan digital programme

The Nye Bevan programme offered by the NHS Leadership Academy is the premier programme for senior leaders looking to move to NHS board roles. A digital version of this programme for CCIOs/CIOs should be commissioned from the Leadership Academy.

5. Fund places on current business school programmes expose NHS digital leaders to a breadth of sectors

Fund or part-fund CCIO/CIO places on existing leading University Business School digital leadership programmes in the following areas that will expose leaders to a wide breadth of experience from other sectors:

· Supporting digital leadership development at board level;

· Managing digital transformation at scale;

· Digital innovation and entrepreneurship

6. Mandate accreditation of CCIOs/CIOs to a minimum professional certification

Mandate a common professional qualification/certification for senior NHS digital leaders as a recognised professional qualification and require future professional accreditation by Faculty of Clinical Informatics for clinical informatics leaders and Fed-IP for IT professionals. This should include creating a guideline of the professional competencies of a board level CCIO/CIO.

For many existing experienced CIOs and CCIOs, it may not be appropriate to put them through lengthy courses, and they will instead need to be grandfathered into the new profession. We suggest this be through a portfolio-based continuing education approach, linked to membership of an appropriate certifying professional body.

Our network is committed to delivering the cadre of informatics leaders required to deliver the transformation of health and care envisaged in the LTP and we look forward to discussing the plan with you.

Yours faithfully

Dr James Reed   **Adrian Byrne**

Chair of the CCIO Network   **Chair of the Health CIO Network**