



at 65

British Future
birthday briefing

British
Future...

On 5 July 1948, with the country slowly rebuilding after the Second World War and rationing still very much in force, a revolution took place in Britain. This was a revolution not of guns and bombs, but of ward rounds and high street surgeries: it was the birth of the National Health Service.

Sixty-five years on and, unlike many others of the same age, the NHS is still going strong. And, although it may sometimes be shaken by tragic episodes such as Stafford, our faith in its values – and value – continues. For many of us, it is a symbol of modern Britain, a source of national pride and what sets us apart from our peers in the developed world. To others, of course, its value is more immediate, more personal.

The NHS is both figuratively and literally part of us. There can be very few in Britain who have not had some interaction with it, and, as such, we are fiercely defensive of it. Even in this ‘age of austerity’ and recognition of the pressures on public spending, more than eight out of ten¹ of us believe the NHS should remain free at the point of use. Unsurprisingly, that figure rises to nearly nine out of ten² among those who are the same age or older than the NHS.

The NHS suggests things about how we might wish our national character to be perceived. Perhaps we hope that the intrinsic sense of fairness and equity of the NHS is seen as a reflection of ‘Britishness’. Certainly the inclusion of a whole movement in last year’s Olympic opening ceremony dedicated to the NHS had British chests swelling with satisfaction. It is possible that this is a game of international one-upmanship, but over three-quarters³ of us believe it was included because the NHS is an important modern symbol of shared British pride.

As a nation, we undoubtedly value not only the institution but the individuals that work within the NHS as well. For many of us, our positive relationships with the GPs, dentists, physios and pharmacists is as much the prism through which we view the NHS as the values that we attribute to it. Just as we value them and their contribution, we seek higher recognition for them too. British Future polling found that 53% support the creation of a new Health Service Medal to recognise people’s contribution to the NHS, sitting alongside the already-established Fire Service Medal as part of the twice-yearly Honours list.

And although it is based on age-old values, the NHS is, in many ways, a very modern institution. It was one of the first employers to welcome those from overseas, even to invite them directly, to work here. Today, nearly four out of five⁴ of us who have taken a view believe that the NHS simply wouldn’t survive in its current form without migrant doctors and nurses. While there is public concern about potential pressure from immigration on hospitals and GP surgeries, this is clearly combined with people’s positive experiences of having been treated by doctors and nurses from overseas. It is a reminder that people can hold competing views, and even sometimes contradictory ones. This is why asking politicians to respond to public concern about immigration in a workable way will often require more nuance than can be captured in a simple headline.

¹ 81% support the NHS remaining free at the point of use.

² Support for the NHS remaining free at the point of use increases through the age groups, with the highest support from

² Support for the NHS remaining free at the point of use increases through the age groups, with the highest support from those aged 65 or older (89%).

³ 77% agree that the NHS was included in the Olympics opening ceremony because it is an important modern symbol of shared British pride.

⁴ Of the 2,006 people polled, 52% agreed that the NHS would not survive without migrant doctors and nurses, with 20% opposed. Once the 571 who either did not know or had no preference were excluded, of the 1,435 who expressed a definitive view, 72 per cent agreed and 28 per cent disagreed.

It is perhaps because of their intrinsic value, not only now but throughout the NHS's history, that we see the NHS as a model for wider integration. Fifty-four per cent⁵ said that the NHS is a good example of how the integration of immigrants can be positive for Britain. From its early days, doctors and nurses from the wider Commonwealth worked alongside their home-grown counterparts, a trend which has continued across the decades.

It has not been without its challenges. For those coming to the UK in the 1950s, '60s and '70s, there were societal tensions. Although there are few reports of overt racism within the NHS, some of those who came to Britain to train and work feel that underlying racism made progression up the career ladder slow. It did not, however, deter them from continuing to work in British hospitals and communities. For example, Dr Abrol Vijayakar came from India in 1965 intending to stay only to further his studies. Forty-eight years later, he is still practising as a GP, serving patients in Birmingham.

There is little doubt of the commitment to the NHS from those who work in it and the commitment of those of us who rely on it. Up and down the country, health trusts and hospitals will be holding parties to celebrate this special anniversary. One thing is certain, though: this 65-year-old is not contemplating retirement just yet.

Jo Tanner is director of communications at British Future

Polling was carried out by ICM on behalf of British Future in June 2013

⁵ Of the 2,006 people polled, 54% agreed that the NHS offers a good example of how integration of immigrants can be positive for Britain; 15% disagreed.

Child of the NHS

Sunder Katwala

I am a child of the NHS, which celebrates its 65th birthday this week. I took my first breath in an NHS hospital, like many millions of Britons. And, if it hadn't been for the NHS, I wouldn't have come to exist at all.

I was born British, in a Yorkshire hospital, in the spring of 1974. Thirty years earlier, my parents had been born some 4,000 miles apart. It was the NHS that brought them both to Britain.

When my dad was born in Baroda, India, not so far away from Mahatma Gandhi's Gujerati birthplace, he too was a British subject, for this was three years before Indian independence. Having become an Indian citizen before his fourth birthday, he has now come full circle and is British again. After studying at medical school, and working for a summer as a doctor on the Indian Railways, he came over to England, 45 years ago, to work for the NHS.

County Cork in Ireland was certainly not British by the time my mother was born there in the late-1940s. But she did not need, or have, a passport to take the ferry from Cork to Holyhead, with a one-way ticket, then a coach south to Portsmouth, to begin her training as a nurse.

Their two journeys, among millions of others, reflect part of the story of how the NHS reaches its 65th birthday having secured its status as Britain's most cherished public institution. It ranks ahead of even the Army, the Monarchy and the Olympic team as a source of pride in being British, and the public selected its birthday as more popular than the Coronation as the 2013 anniversary that means most to people. Danny Boyle's inclusion of the NHS in the Olympic opening ceremony as a source of British pride gets overwhelming approval.

And there is also a clear public recognition that Britain's most popular institution has depended upon immigration. ICM's new polling for British Future found that most people agree that the NHS would not survive in its current form without foreign doctors and nurses, with only 20% opposition to that statement. Despite broader public anxieties about immigration, its contribution in providing skills that the NHS needs is widely valued as being in our national interest. This makes the NHS a positive symbol of integration, as much as of integration. Those who came to this country from overseas have contributed to something which we all value and use.

My Indian-Irish story reflects another, perhaps more neglected, way in which the NHS has contributed to integration in Britain's increasingly diverse society. It was one of the first workplaces in Britain to have a significant level of diversity (partly reflecting more widespread discrimination in jobs outside the public sector). So it also helped to forge some of the earliest mixed race relationships in post-war Britain, in the decades before that became an unexceptional norm.

NHS Milestones

- 1948: Nye Bevin opens Park hospital in Manchester
- 1952: Prescription charge of 1 shilling introduced
- 1958: The first comprehensive vaccination programme
- 1960: First UK kidney transplant at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary
- 1961: The contraceptive pill is made widely available
- 1972: CT scans used for the first time
- 1978: The world's first Test Tube baby
- 1988: Breast screening introduced
- 1994: Organ Donor Register is launched
- 2002: The first gene therapy treatment is carried out at Great Ormond Street Hospital
- 2011: Mathew Green becomes the first person in the UK to receive a totally artificial human heart.

When my parents met around 1970, most people said they would be worried if their children wanted to marry across ethnic lines. (My grandparents did too, but my Dad turned down his father's offer to arrange a marriage for him back in Gujarat). Commentators worried earnestly about whether the children of such relationships could cope. Those anxieties have been proved baseless. The 2011 census showed a doubling to more than 1.2 million people of those ticking the "mixed race" box. The vast majority of people now see this as a healthy indicator, that people do mix in a diverse society. The proportion uncomfortable about mixed relationships has dropped from 50% to 15% in just thirty years. Whenever I bump into somebody West Indian-Irish or Indian-Scots, I find that there is a good chance that the NHS figures somewhere in the family story of how their parents met.

My twin sister now carries on that family tradition, and has been nursing for the last twelve years. 'I'm really proud to work for the NHS,' she says. 'My experience is that most nurses do care about what they are doing and are passionate about it. We need to cherish that value of compassion in the NHS.'

Nobody thinks the NHS is perfect. The Stafford scandal and CQC cover-up have rightly seen sharp criticisms where it has failed. Yet this has done little to shake people's bedrock commitment to the core principles and values of the NHS, but rather to demand that its ethos of care is properly upheld.

Away from the headlines, personal patient experiences are much more often positive than negative. The NHS has often provided the backdrop, literally from cradle to grave, at the moments of greatest joy and sorrow in many of our lives.

Above all, the reassurance that the NHS is there, so that it is possible to get something checked out, without stress over the pressure of bills or whether an insurance policy will turn out to cover it, provides an important sense of serenity and security.

As a parent of young children myself, I cannot imagine not being able to rely on high quality care that is free at the point of use. Taking my five-year-old on the adventure of a short drive in the dark to see the "night doctor" out-of-hours sparked many questions from him - How did the doctor manage to stay awake, did they have to sleep in the morning – but it also provided me with the answer that all parents want to hear: he'll be fine.

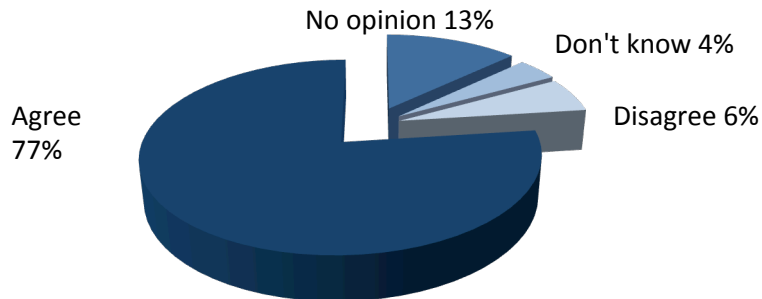
His generation of children of the NHS may well face some difficult decisions about this much-loved institution in their lifetime but, as it celebrates this milestone birthday, let's reflect on how much it has contributed to modern British life.

Sunder Katwala is Director of British Future

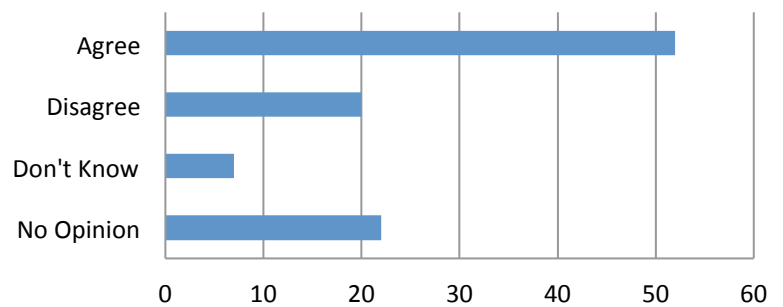
The NHS at 65: What Britain thinks

Graphs showing results of a national poll of a representative sample of 2,006 adults

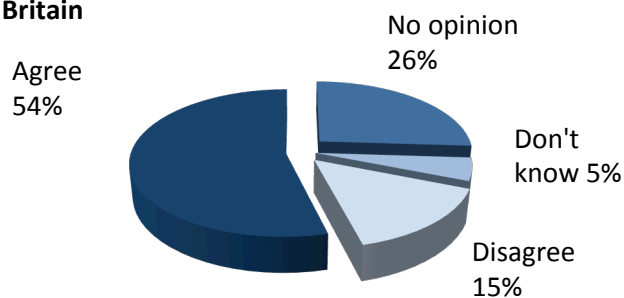
The NHS was included as part of the Olympic opening ceremony as an important modern symbol of shared British pride.



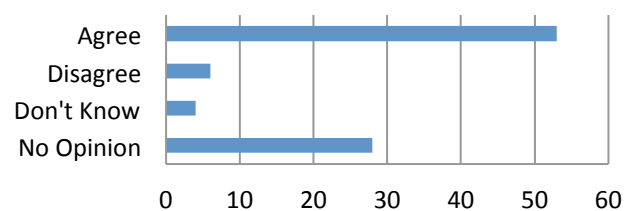
The NHS wouldn't survive in its current form without foreign doctors and nurses to work for it



The NHS offers a good example of how integration of immigrants can be positive for Britain



Would you support the creation of a new Health Service Medal to recognise those who have made a significant contribution to the NHS?



Memories of the NHS

I was a medical student in the 1950s and was one of only seven women in my class of 70. I was always interested in people, in how the human body was made up and how it functions, so I suppose medicine was the obvious choice. When I was working in Manchester, there registrars from Egypt and France, Canada and Spain, Poland and East Africa. Before I started at medical school I had never seen a black person, but I realised how much we had in common, even though there were widely divergent views over politics and religion.

Patricia Linnell, who qualified as a doctor at St Mary's, Paddington, in 1956

I landed in London from India on New Year's Eve 1965, having graduating the day Kennedy was killed. My aim in coming over here was to do post graduate qualification in gynaecology, but I very soon decided that I would not go back to India to live and work. In 1967 I went Birmingham to visit a friend whose wife had delivered their first baby and after that visit, I decided that I would not live there. Now I am a GP in Birmingham and have no regrets what so ever. I have definitely experienced racial discrimination in this country, but very little from the patients. However, the NHS is a very warm, if not hot, bed of institutional racism. I have fought that ever since my first regular job in 1966. I think that discrimination of one sort or another, though not racial, made me leave India and I could fight and live with it in this country because of that.

Abrol Vijayakar, aged 72, Birmingham GP

In 1986 I was born 13 weeks premature by emergency caesarean. Normally parents get to hold their baby as they enter into the outside world, but my parents could only stare at me in the plastic box of an incubator. Thanks to the team, my condition improved over a few weeks but I was not yet out of the woods. I had developed a hernia and once again was in need of urgent treatment. The doctors at Pilgrim had to move me on to the care of Leela Kapila, a renowned specialist who, resplendent in her sari, saved my life. My family never forgot the actions of the staff at the Pilgrim, and particularly Mrs Kapila. And so, every year on my birthday, my parents and I became pilgrims, visiting the team at the hospital and presenting them with a birthday cake to say thank you to all those who worked so hard to save my life.

Doug Jefferson, Lincolnshire

For me the major impact was not in 1948 when the NHS actually came into being, but rather two years earlier, when the Act was passed and its implications widely discussed. At that time I was still at school and I remember the topic being the subject of a formal classroom debate. I was the lead speaker in favour of an NHS and a friend whose mother was a GP spoke against the move. My father worked as a patternmaker in an engineering factory and I had been aware of the worries of "doctors' bills." The NHS comprises a fantastic set of people who do a fantastic job under conditions of intense pressure. As my wife and I are now in our eighties we have in recent years had our share of being NHS out-patients and in-patients and we have nothing but praise for the staff who have cared for us. On quite a few occasions, while waiting in out-patients, my wife (who is an ex-Ward Sister) has been quite "crisp" with people moaning about being kept waiting!

George Pollock, Birmingham Medical Institute