LDCs call for revolution freedom

 Eddie Crouch received rousing cheers at the Conference of local dental committees (LDCs) following his speech on the state of NHS dentistry.

Speaking to delegates at the pre-Conference dinner, he said: ‘The whole new contracting arrangement was about securing state control over NHS dentistry - control of where and how NHS dentistry is delivered and how much public money is spent on it. But he added: ‘The level of control that was introduced affects all of us who still work within the NHS.’

Chairman of this year’s Conference of LDCs, Dr Crouch had harsh words for the Department of Health (DOH), its minister and the chief dental officer. But the British Dental association (BDA) and its general dental practice committee (GDPC) also failed to escape the wrath of his words.

Referring to the minister, Ann Keen, who had provisionally accepted his invitation to attend the conference six months ago he said: ‘It dentistry important to this government or is it just one more of this Government’s public statements that must be questioned?’

Having tried both in 2005 and 2006 to galvanise the BDA and GDPC into action over the new contract, Dr Crouch was clearly unimpressed.

He said: ‘The GDPC’s failure to recognise the depth of feeling at that LDC Conference is deeply worrying.’ He added: ‘Do the BDA committees actually make policy decisions and set political direction in the way dentists want anyway?’

Nevertheless, he thanked the BDA for assisting his court case as an interested party. He said: ‘I did not expect them to pay my costs but it was the judge who thought they should help.’

Dr Crouch thanked all the ‘wonderful people’ who had supported him through his Judicial Review. ‘The letters of encouragement and the generous financial assistance from dozens and dozens of supporters have helped me and my family immensely’, he said.

In conclusion, Dr Crouch said that it would be a sad day when dentists queue up for IT training in presessional skills to impress primary care trusts with business plans and box ticking exercises, instead of improving clinical skills on postgraduate courses to provide better care for their patients.

The theme of Evolution, not Revolution, was reflected at the conference the day after. ‘Talks of working with the DoH and accepting that the contract is here to stay were yet top of the list.’

More people than ever before came forward to say that the new arrangements could work - despite serious misgivings.

The set tone was amplified by Lester Eillman, chair of the General Dental Practice Committee (GDPC). He said: ‘We need change - not a knee-jerk, panic-stricken, untired change, but evidence-based, tried and tested change. We need evolution, not revolution.’ (See page two for more on this speech).

Meanwhile, the conference agenda committee is to take over and manage all future conference events. This includes the responsibility that ‘conference resolutions will be considered expeditiously by the GDPC or other appropriate bodies.’

The unprecedented move, means the conference can now liaise directly with the DoH and its minister, instead of relying on the GDPC.

Conference elected Jerry Asquith to chair the conference in 2009, and Richard Emmus the following year.