

# Wes Streeting can't blame the NHS for its failings: that...

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The [Guardian has reported](#) this morning that:

*Wes Streeting has called England's healthcare watchdog "not fit for purpose" after an interim report found significant failings were hampering its ability to identify poor performance at hospitals, care homes and GP practices.*

This is the [second time this morning](#) that I am forced to note Labour has apparently discovered something that everyone knew. Roy Lilley's newsletter on the state of the NHS has reported this failing for ages. Streeting should have been reading it.

So, let's mention why the Care Quality Commission (CQC) can't work.

First, that is because it has been used to blame NHS staff for the systemic failings of the NHS for most of the life of the Tory government. An organisation whose *raison d'être* is to buck pass whilst ignoring the fact that NHS failings are down to political choices to deny that service the funding it needs is always going to fail, and by design.

Second, who would want to work in an organisation with that remit? Of course it is having trouble finding suitably qualified staff.

Third, it is underfunded: why work for it?

But most importantly, and fourth, quality inspections cannot and never will raise standards. That goal is achieved by providing sufficient funding and letting staff react to priorities. Quality audits presuppose a shortage of resources and, as a result, focus on organisations achieving centrally prescribed priorities, whether they are appropriate or not.

We have seen this system not just fail but cause considerable harm in schools when delivered by Ofsted. It is no better in the health service.

The reason why is simple. The logic of reorganisation of both the NHS and schools over this century has been to supposedly decentralise control to assist preparation for

privatisation whilst at the same time imposing draconian central control from Whitehall, which demands its goals are met. The goals are obviously contradictory. There is an inherent conflict within the structure of schools and the NHS which no amount of inspection can overcome, most especially when it is not allowed to comment on it as a cause of failure.

We Streeting has to decide. Does he want to control the NHS, or does he want it to have operational freedom? When he can make up his mind on that (which I am not expecting any time soon), then there is a chance that standards in the NHS might improve.

But I stress that there is only one answer that is politically viable, which is central control, and only one answer which is operationally viable, which is to trust local management to respond to local situations. He will have to live with the stress, and the odd failure, because that's what happens in systems run by people.

Could Wes get his head around that? Watching his performance in interviews in the media this morning, I doubt it.