



26<sup>th</sup> July 2006

Sir David Cooksey  
Cooksey Review Secretariat  
HM Treasury, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
1 Horse Guards Road  
London, SW1A 2HQ

Dear Sir David,

### **Review of UK Health Research**

Thank you for your invitation to submit comments to your review, to which I am pleased to respond on behalf of the NHS Service Delivery and Organisation R&D Programme (SDO). In response to your request for responses to be evidence-based, I also enclose an evaluation of the impact of the SDO Programme, to which reference is made below. Our comments are as follows

- 1) Overview of SDO Programme.** The NHS SDO R&D Programme is one of the national NHS research programmes and now part of the National Institute of Health Research. It was established in 1999 to consolidate and develop the evidence base on the organisation and delivery of health services and to promote the uptake of this evidence into policy and practice. Since 1999 it has committed over £40m to commissioning approximately 150 research projects, about 40% of which are now completed. The programme operates at arms-length from the Department of Health and has a co-ordinating centre based at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Further details on the programme are provided in the enclosed 'Impact Analysis of the NHS SDO R&D Programme' and on our website at [www.sdo.lshtm.ac.uk](http://www.sdo.lshtm.ac.uk).
- 2) Impact of the SDO Programme.** The co-ordinating centre has recently concluded an analysis of the impact of the programme since its establishment, which is enclosed as supporting evidence<sup>1</sup>. This uses a multidimensional approach to assess impact, including bibliographic analysis to assess primary outputs and a case study approach to assess impact on service delivery, policy-making, capacity building and the extent to which projects have acted as a platform for further research. This approach conforms to current thinking on best practice in research impact evaluation, which recommends multi-method approaches, especially for applied

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<sup>1</sup> 'An impact analysis of the NHS Service Delivery and Organisation R&D Programme' Stephen Peckham and Micky Willmott, NCCSDO, July 2006.

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research<sup>2</sup>. The analysis that SDO has had an impact not just in terms of knowledge production but also in knowledge utilisation, with numerous examples of engagement with policy-makers and practitioners by SDO-funded researchers. We also draw attention to the value of our growing collection of reports as an international resource (available via our website) of high quality syntheses and primary research.

- 3) **SDO Research is of high importance**, because the organisations and systems within which health care is delivered are a major determinant of effectiveness, quality and safety. The organisation of services is, in itself, a pivotal technology for health care delivery and will be key to ensuring that the NHS improves and remains fit for purpose over the coming decades.
- 4) **SDO is unique**, because no other programme occupies the same territory. The Health Services and Public Health Research (HSPHR) programme of the MRC is probably the closest equivalent research council programme but has a different focus. SDO funds mostly synthesis of existing knowledge and primary research, whereas HSPHR funds mostly clinical trials and research infrastructure. SDO has contributed towards the building of capacity in UK Health Services Research and also has a distinctive philosophy that leads it to commission research and promote its uptake in a way that is highly engaged with policy makers, clinical practitioners, NHS managers and service users. SDO also tends to support a wider range of disciplinary and methodological approaches than HSPHR, with a greater emphasis on the social sciences.
- 5) **SDO is a response to market failure**. Although there remain a host of issues related to increasing research intensity and to technology transfer, it remains the case that commercial incentives and mechanisms can, broadly speaking, be relied upon to support the translation of research into new drugs, therapies, devices, diagnostics, implants and other healthcare products. This is emphatically not the case for service delivery and organisation research, which rarely produces intellectual property that can be protected. This is especially true in the UK, where the NHS IP framework requires new knowledge in this field to be freely shared within the NHS. For this reason, industry has not been interested in investing in service delivery and organisation research. Neither has it been much supported by the research councils or the research charities, for reasons which are not obvious given the potential of this type of research to improve health services. These are considerations which led the Department of Health to establish the SDO Programme in 1999 and they remain relevant today.
- 6) **SDO research is important to the UK economy**, notwithstanding the lack of commercial drivers referred to above. This is because it addresses issues of cost-effectiveness in health-care delivery; of the utilisation of health services and of preventative health services. As Wanless demonstrated, these will be vital questions for the performance of the UK economy as the population continues to age. We

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<sup>2</sup> 'Medical research: assessing the benefits to society'. A report by the UK Evaluation Forum, supported by the Academy of Medical Sciences, Medical Research Council and Wellcome Trust (2006).

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would like to see the concept of a 'fully-engaged' scenario extended to include systemic commitment to evidence-informed policy and practice.

- 7) **SDO achieves both alignment with NIHR priorities and scientific quality.** Like other NHS R&D programmes, SDO operates within the remit of the National Institute of Health Research, the strategy of which has been endorsed by government. However, to ensure that it only supports research of the highest scientific quality and relevance, the programme operates a transparent and independent system for research commissioning, which includes full peer-review. In this way it achieves the twin goals of ensuring both relevance and scientific rigour.
- 8) **The key message from SDO** is that whatever institutional arrangements are put in place for a single health research fund, these should maintain and strengthen a programme of research commissioning in the field of service delivery and organisation that a) builds on SDO achievements to date b) maintains the distinctive community of multidisciplinary health services research currently supported by SDO and c) promotes an interactive model of knowledge production and utilisation. Any new arrangements should also explicitly address how research of this type is taken through into improved policy and practice. This requires a national architecture for getting research into practice, with clarity about roles, interfaces and incentives.
- 9) The invitation also asks for **lessons from overseas.** We draw to your attention the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation, with which SDO has strong links and shared interests. The mission of this agency is: 'to support evidence-informed decision-making in the organization, management and delivery of health services through funding research, building capacity and transferring knowledge'. In pursuit of this mission, CHSRF builds knowledge transfer and exchange into every aspect of its operations and has developed a range of innovative programmes and activities to harness research in improving the Canadian health care system. We believe that there is scope for the UK to learn from this approach.
- 10) The Review will obviously be considering the issue of devolution, given that research councils are UK-wide and DH research is England-only, with equivalents in the devolved administrations. SDO is part of this issue, as it is an English programme with a remit to commission research that is primarily of relevance to the NHS in England (although it does commission research from universities in the devolved administrations).

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment and best wishes for the review process.

Yours sincerely,



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