

# **NHS Service Delivery and Organisation R&D Programme**

## **RAPID RESPONSE COMMISSIONING MODE**

### **NEW PROGRAMME OF RESEARCH ON WORKFORCE ISSUES**

#### **SCOPING EXERCISE 1: WORKFORCE AND HEALTH OUTCOMES**

##### **Introduction**

Under its rapid response commissioning mode, the SDO Programme wishes to commission a short scoping exercise on the relationship between workforce issues and health outcomes in the NHS. This is one of three workforce scopes being commissioned by the SDO. The others focus on skill mix issues in secondary care, and on the impact of local labour market factors on the organisation and delivery of health services, respectively. Separate briefs are available for each.

It is recognized that these themes are closely related and overlap, but each of the three scopes is intended to have a different focus. Along with other initiatives, the scopes will inform the SDO's Workforce Commissioning Group about research priorities in this area, and enable it to commission appropriate empirical research.

##### **Background**

The context for these scoping exercises is the increasing profile that workforce issues have in the delivery of effective, timely and appropriate health care. In a Refreshing of the National Listening Exercise carried out by the SDO Programme during 2002, workforce issues emerged as the top priority for further SDO research. They have come to the fore for a variety of reasons. Problems concerning the recruitment, retention and morale of staff have increased in recent years. At the same time attention has been drawn to the relationship between workforce issues and the organisation and delivery of health care in a number of documents, including the *NHS Plan* and the *National Service Frameworks*.

Workforce is an extremely broad term and initiatives concerned with the NHS workforce have occurred at a number of levels. A review of workforce planning in the NHS was originally recommended by the House of Commons Select Committee in March 1999. The consultation document *A Health Service of all the Talents: Developing the NHS Workforce*, appeared in April 2000. A White Paper, *Investment and Reform for NHS Staff: Taking Forward the NHS Plan*, followed in February 2001. This provided the foundation for modernization of NHS workforce planning.

A number of national bodies concerned with NHS workforce issues have since been established. The *Workforce Numbers Advisory Board* advises on the future number of training places required. The *National Workforce Development Board* has responsibility for delivering the required number of training commissions. The twenty four *Workforce*

*Development Confederations* are concerned with developing innovative approaches to the delivery of integrated education and training.

*Care Group Workforce Teams* take a national overview of the challenges of delivering services to particular client groups. Within the Modernisation Agency the *Changing Workforce Programme* is supporting new ways of working in health and social care, to improve patient services, tackle staff shortages and increase job satisfaction. An evaluation of the first wave of thirteen pilot sites, supported by the Department of Health's Policy Research Programme, is currently underway. Pay and conditions of service of NHS staff is under review following publication of *Agenda for Change: Modernising the NHS Pay System*, and subsequent guidance.

Proposals for scoping exercises on workforce issues will need to take account of these and other developments in this rapidly developing field.

### **Workforce and health outcomes**

The remit of the SDO Programme in relation to workforce is limited to the impact of workforce issues on the organization and delivery of services, and does not extend to broader policy issues relating to the NHS workforce. Aspects of workforce of specific interest to the SDO Programme include the relationship between workforce issues and health outcomes, skill mix issues, particularly in secondary care, and the impact of local labour markets and local pay bargaining on the delivery of services.

It is recognized that each of these is itself a very large topic, and in order to take the research agenda forward the SDO now wishes to commission appropriate and separate scopes which focus on a particular theme. These are issues where current literature is limited and fragmented. SDO wishes to obtain a clearer picture of the extent and nature of this literature, to gain a better understanding of the conceptual, methodological and other issues involved, and to develop a research agenda in this field.

This scope is concerned with the relationship between workforce issues and health outcomes. Both of these terms will need to be interpreted broadly. Whilst skill mix and other issues will be important, the focus of the scope should be on health outcomes.

Particular questions which might be addressed here include:

- What evidence is there about the relationship between workforce issues and health outcomes, including quality of care?
- What impact does the number and mix of medical staff (by specialist training and grade) have on the quality and clinical effectiveness of care?
- What evidence is there about the relationship between the number and mix of nursing staff (by specialist training and grade) and health outcomes such as length of patient stay?
- Is there any evidence of health outcomes being better when a particular service is provided by one professional group rather than another?

## Nature of the Scope

The aim of this scope is to advise the SDO Programme what research should be commissioned in this area. The scope should therefore include the following:

1. A map of the available published and grey research literatures (theoretical and empirical) from the health care sector. This should include private and public (non-health sectors) where appropriate.

A comprehensive literature review is not required at this stage. However the review should be sufficiently comprehensive and rigorous to be able to identify the research which has been carried out, gaps in the field, and relevant methodological issues which may be important to consider in future commissioning.

2. An analysis of the current NHS context, and how the findings from the scoping exercise can inform the development of workforce management within the NHS.
3. The policy implications for the Department of Health, and the various NHS organisations, of the findings of the scoping exercise.
4. Identification of areas for further research, and how these might be addressed.

Applicants should demonstrate that they have an excellent understanding of current workforce developments in the NHS, and should indicate how they will take account of developments occurring during the course of the scoping exercise. Applicants should also explicitly state how their proposed scoping exercise adds to our generalisable knowledge of the management, organisation and delivery of health services.

The proposed scopes should take no more than 4 months to complete. By way of guidance it is anticipated that searches will be completed within 6 weeks, that analysis and interpretation will take an additional 6 weeks, and that report writing will be completed within a further 4 weeks.

## Methods

Applicants should clearly outline their proposed methods for the scope. In mapping the literature the following areas should be covered:

- The theoretical bases of the review.
- Methods for identifying relevant published and grey literatures. It is expected that applicants will plan to use a variety of methods including the research team's prior knowledge; search of electronic databases; and advice from key researchers and practitioners in the field.
- Methods for judging the quality of the literature available and for summarising the results should also be made explicit.
- Methods for providing an analysis of the current and changing NHS context.

The scope may also include the collection of statistical and other data where appropriate. Applicants may also wish to undertake some interviews with key informants.

Applicants should indicate what other issues will be included in the scope. These may include conceptual and definitional issues, and methodological issues. All scopes must include suggestions for the commissioning of further research.

Applicants should demonstrate that they have assembled a team of researchers whose knowledge and skills are appropriate. This may mean involving research experts not currently included in the rapid response team.

## **Outputs**

The principal output of the scope will be a detailed report, providing a map of the literature that should:

- contain a short and coherent executive summary;
- critically describe the methods used and the available literature;
- provide an authoritative, thorough and substantive map of the available literatures (both theoretical and empirical) and its implications;
- provide rigorous and detailed conclusions about what is currently known in this area and the strength of the evidence on which this is based;
- clearly identify areas for further research and how they might be addressed. This could include both more systematic reviews of the literature and/or primary research; and
- contain an analysis which clearly indicates how the findings are relevant to developing policy and practice in the NHS.

In addition, the scoping report should include discussion of the other issues identified under methods, as described above.

The research team should produce a report which will be appropriate for use by the SDO's Workforce Commissioning Group, when deciding on the approaches to take when commissioning further substantive research in this area. Successful applicants may be required to present their completed work to the SDO Programme Board.

## **Guidance Notes for submitting a proposal: Workforce Scoping Exercises**

Applications will be considered in a single stage process. Applicants should therefore submit full proposals using the A4 Literature Review Application Form by **1pm on Friday 31 January 2003** to:

**Mr Damian O'Boyle**

Commissioning Manager

National Co-ordinating Centre for NHS Service Delivery and Organisation Research and Development

99 Gower Street

London

WC1E 6AZ

**damian.oboyle@lshtm.ac.uk**

**FIVE HARD COPIES** of the proposal should be submitted (minimum font 10pt), using the A4 Literature Review Application Form.

**ONE ELECTRONIC COPY** of the proposal should be submitted (minimum font 10pt), using the A4 Literature Review Application Form via email to Damian O'Boyle prior to the closing date and time.

No late applications will be considered. Please note we will not accept faxed or hand written proposals.

Please ensure that your proposal complies with the Research Governance Framework, which can be found on the Department of Health website, or via a link on the SDO website under the 'Call for Proposals' page.

The budget for each of these scopes is expected to be up to **£50,000**. Please note that our final decisions will be based on the overall quality of the applications received.

Projects should start no later than **1 April 2003**, and must be completed within 4 months. The target date for submission of the final report is **31 July 2003**.

We anticipate that there will be informal discussions with NCCSDO during the period in which the report is prepared to clarify issues as they arise.

**Addendum**

This document was published by the National Coordinating Centre for the Service Delivery and Organisation (NCCSDO) research programme, managed by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

The management of the Service Delivery and Organisation (SDO) programme has now transferred to the National Institute for Health Research Evaluations, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre (NETSCC) based at the University of Southampton. Prior to April 2009, NETSCC had no involvement in the commissioning or production of this document and therefore we may not be able to comment on the background or technical detail of this document. Should you have any queries please contact [sdo@southampton.ac.uk](mailto:sdo@southampton.ac.uk).