

Issue 1 Spring 2007

RESEARCH

Capacity News



Hywel Williams,
chair of the
national network
of RDSUs.

It is with great pride that I reflect briefly on the achievements of the network to date.

Our achievements speak for themselves. The group has been one of the most productive and harmonious national groups that I have ever had the pleasure of working with.

RDSUs are being embedded in all sorts of initiatives such as the Research for Patient Benefit Programme and many national consultations.

Our main outputs include:

- www.national-rdsu.org.uk RDSUs, their coverage, courses, expertise, and discussion list
- A paper on public health research disseminated to the public health group of the UKCRC
- Responses to “Best Research for Best Health”, the Cooksey review and the SCIE Research Capacity Development consultation

- A national RDSU conference “Sharing Expertise” May 2006
- A report on engagement with Strategic Health Authorities and Workforce Development Confederations
- Substantial research on the scientific basis and evidence for effective research capacity development – the ReCap report
- Joint training and education group with the UKCRN delivering the new national research training agenda
- Joint group also working with the UKCRN to establish realistic frameworks for accrediting RDSUs and Clinical Trial Support Units.
- Joint working on research bids
- This newsletter

Gosh – that’s rather a lot. And it is all due to effective team work underpinned by a strong commitment to our purpose – that of increasing the research capacity of the health and social care through high quality and appropriate training and networking.

We have come a long way in a short time, and we still have a lot to achieve.

Hywel Williams

Research and Development Support Units (RDSUs) play a central role in supporting the Department of Health research strategy, ‘Best Research for Best Health’. The first RDSU was established in 1994 and there are currently 15 RDSUs in England. We provide consultative advice on research methodology and protocol development, support research training and capacity building in health and social care, collaborate in research projects and provide a service that is available to all potential and established National Health Service researchers.

RDSUs have

- A significant history and knowledge of research capacity development techniques and processes
- Extensive contacts in universities and beyond to facilitate collaborations
- Access to specialist advice for research teams
- Established training programmes

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Research capacity development: What works?

Over eleven thousand references were recently retrieved and sifted by a team from Trent RDSU to compile a review of the research capacity development (RCD) literature for the NHS. Finally, 172 articles were included in a scoping report commissioned by the DH through the National Coordinating Centre for Research Capacity Development (NCCRCD).

Research capacity development is 'a process of individual and institutional development which leads to higher levels of skills and greater ability to perform useful research'. (Trostle, 1992)

Many databases from diverse fields including health, social care, education and agriculture were interrogated to maximise learning.

The literature points to three general purposes of RCD: to gain health and support service improvement, to build and strengthen a science base in health care, and promote economic gain and wealth. The balance and level of importance of these three general purposes influences the appropriateness of planning interventions and how we measure and interpret outcomes.

A prism meta-model

A new model for what happens in the NHS was proposed after assessing many models of capacity development. (see diagram)

The team thinks that:

- Development of research capacity is like light entering, interacting with, and then exiting a prism.
- RCD occurs at three levels: individual, organisational and policy. These levels run through the length of the prism like geological strata.
- Novice researchers or organisations with little experience in conducting research are at the front end of the prism. Here interventions focus on "capacity building".
- Organisations with more experience and a research track record are further along the prism. Here interventions focus on building on existing capabilities and systematically addressing identified deficiencies.

The model stresses the importance of developing a needs assessment before planning RCD interventions. It highlights that

needs and drivers include social, economic, culture and political issues. These in turn influence planning and setting priorities, and how progress is measured.

Current NHS R&D policy drivers, for example, include the importance of wealth creation in relation to R&D as well as promoting health, research collaborations and networking.

The team say measurement should examine intermediate outcomes (at the point where the 'light' exits the prism), but also long term outcomes. The latter should be carried out some time after the RCD initiatives have taken place.

Interventions

The report also explores the evidence on effectiveness for a range of RCD 'interventions' which include:

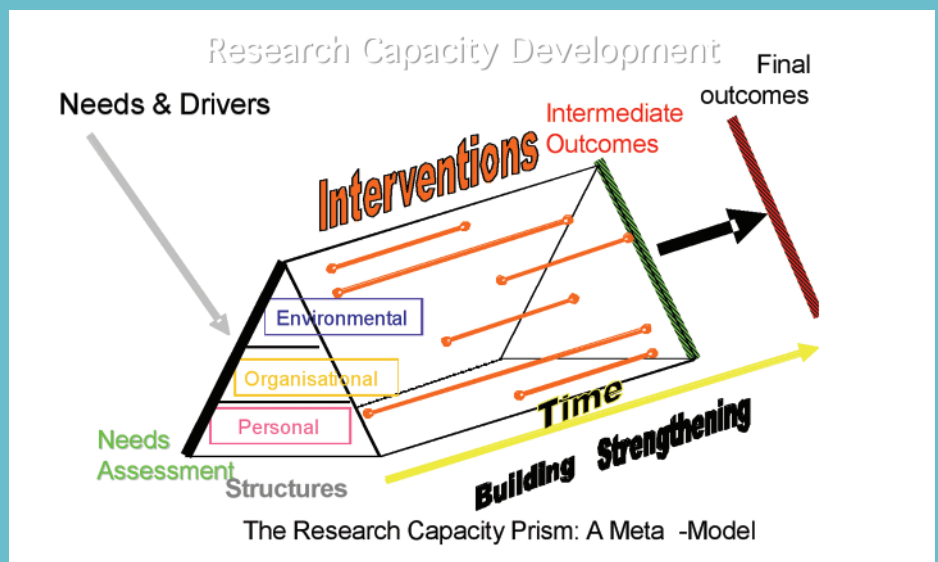
- Prioritisation: developing research priorities from consensus views of informed participants
- Mentoring: where an experienced, highly regarded person guides another individual in the development and examination of their own ideas, learning and personal and professional development
- Leadership: the process of influencing group activities towards the achievement of RCD goals
- Research facilitators: individuals whose role is explicitly to promote and enable the

conduct of research by those with limited research experience

- Training: interventions that aim to increase skills and knowledge
- Funding to develop RCD including bursaries and fellowships
- Networks and collaborations: structures and functions that support people to work together to improve knowledge transfer, innovation, a research process or an output
- Infrastructure: range of activities used to enhance support of RCD

We will follow this story in subsequent newsletters. The full ReCap report [Cooke J, Booth A, Nancarrow S, Wilkinson A and Askew D. Re:Cap – A scoping review to identify the evidence base for Research Capacity development in health and social care. Sheffield: Trent Research & Development Support Unit, University of Sheffield, 2006] can be found at: <http://www.national-rdsu.org.uk/Downloads/RECAP.pdf>.

EPPICentre (2005) A scoping review of the evidence for incentive schemes to encourage positive health and other social behaviours in young people. London: EPPICentre, 2005
Trostle J. Research Capacity building and international health: Definitions, evaluations and strategies for success. Social Science and Medicine. 1992;35:1321–1324



Focus on RDFunding: Saving £3,300,000 a year!

RD Info is the umbrella organisation which includes, *RD Learning* a web based database of post qualification training courses for research, *RDFunding* direct electronic access to information on health-related funding opportunities and *RDDirect*, a telephone help-line for researchers at all levels. In this issue we interviewed Christine Parker-Jones, the Director of RD Info, to find out more about RDFunding.

RDFunding was set up in 1997, why was it needed?

There was no central resource listing all national and international research funding and people wasted huge amounts of time looking in many places. In 2005, we worked out that if all of the NHS trusts with R&D departments employed 0.5 of a person, on a basic salary of £24,000 p.a., the total cost of finding and disseminating this information would be approximately £3,300,000!

RDFunding highlights the availability of very large amounts of research funding from sources hitherto unknown to many researchers.

How many people visit the website?

Over 5,000 visitors a month, most of whom are regulars. The vast majority of universities and NHS Trusts who have a health research budget use our emailing service, which automatically provides them with targeted information on relevant funding opportunities.

You provide information on over 1400 funding organisations who between them offer nearly 6000 awards, how do you put all the information together?

We work in close collaboration with major national and international sources of funding such as the DH, the UK Research Councils, large charities and professional bodies, the European

Commission and the National Institutes of Health in the USA.

There is a continual quest to find organisations that fund health-related research. Some organisations stop funding research but, overall, the number of funders has increased each year. We check health journals and the press, trawl the internet, subscribe to mailing lists and check directories such as The Directory of Grant Making Trusts to find new funding opportunities.

Organisations also contact us directly asking for their details to be included on the database, for example the Food Standards Agency and the Worshipful Company of Curriers. A template can be downloaded and used to submit the required information.

What else do you offer?

A variety of tools available to make life easier not just for an individual researcher, but also for the research community. These tools were developed specifically to support NHS R&D departments and RDSUs, freeing them up to aid researchers.

Anyone can register for the **profiling service** which keeps researchers updated with the latest funding opportunities targeted to their research areas. Details of funding opportunities are available through a RSS newsfeed from the website. And grants can be viewed by closing date to help timetable the writing of funding applications. There over 5,200 registered users who receive the weekly email update.

Special editions have been produced on a variety of subjects, including topics tailored to DH priorities and the UKCRN topic specific networks e.g. Cancer, Diabetes and Dementia. Among others, there are special editions for New Researchers and Travel Awards. They are



updated at four-monthly intervals to ensure continuing relevance. To date, 25 special editions have been created, of which the complementary therapy edition has proved the most popular, with over 4,400 downloads.

The '**Research Process Flowchart**' on the website provides links to resources, presentations and checklists, all designed to guide health professionals through the different stages involved in research.

Newsletters can be downloaded from the website and distributed, displayed on notice boards, placed in pigeon holes, etc., as required. The format can be chosen from three options:

- all grants added or updated in the last 9 days
- all grants with closing dates between two dates
- a monthly newsletter highlighting a few pertinent calls

The first two can be tailored for redistribution, to include the name of the organisation and as much detail about the funding call as required.

The team also runs **funding workshops** and presentations at research days providing basic and helpful hints and tips on finding research funding.

For more information go to:
www.rdinfo.org.uk/

National Issues: Patient and public involvement in research

Government policy to involve the public and service users in health and social care research is actively sponsored through the work of INVOLVE (www.invo.org.uk). Active public involvement in health research has been growing in recent years, alongside an understanding that it is in principle 'a good thing'. However, the government did not specify who was expected to strategically lead or take part in this activity, and plans for evaluating the policy were undefined. Only with the advent of Best Research for Best Health has there been clearer policy guidance and strategies to encourage the embedding of a public involvement perspective in health research. Historically, RDSUs have provided varying amounts of public involvement support. This is changing, with RDSUs reporting increased levels of activity around public and service user involvement.

How do RDSUs help?

The NHS R&D Forum User/Carer Working Group (www.rdforum.nhs.uk) aims to facilitate and empower service users and carers involvement in NHS R&D. On behalf of the group, Mary Cooke Lecturer, School of Nursing and Midwifery, University of Sheffield and Nicola Coe, Peninsula RDSU undertook a survey of RDSUs in 2005 to find out to what extent they support service users and carers involvement in NHS research. A questionnaire was distributed to all RDSUs, with a 100% response rate.

Mary reported the results to the national RDSU network in 2006. She said it was clear the results showed RDSUs are aware of their responsibilities for co-operating with policy, but the range of support offered varies across the country. In some, patient/public involvement in research is a key priority, demonstrated by engagement in a range of activities. In others, support is more limited.

RDSUs suggested these activities could be supported:

- Research skills workshops for service users and carers
- Workshops for researchers on involving service users and carers in research
- Bespoke workshops for service users

- and carers involvement groups
- Individual support provided to researchers, service users and carers
- Helpsheets on user involvement in research
- Regional/local conferences on service users and carers involvement in research
- Active links with Patient Public Involvement strategy in the NHS
- Active engagement with Foundation Trust members
- Active engagement with Patient Forums
- Patient and Public Involvement Research Advisory Group contributing at all stages of the research process
- Communication with the interested patient and public; for example mailing lists, group membership

RDSU activities

Since the survey was carried out, RDSUs have become more active in supporting service users and carers in the research process. Trent have begun to identify local user groups and determine their member's needs in developing research capacity and capability.

The SE RDSU

The SE RDSU has developed a model for putting researchers and service users and carers in contact with each other. Interested people are recorded on a confidential database, which the SE RDSU uses to match up researchers and people on the database, to discuss working together. All information is kept confidential, until there is agreement to work together. The SE RDSU is also part of a national pilot managed by INVOLVE of leaflets about research involvement aimed at users/public.

Southampton and North West Hampshire RDSU

Southampton and North West Hampshire RDSU are expanding and developing a role in encouraging researchers to involve the patients and the wider public in their research. Training courses have been run on involvement in research, including involving children and young people. During 2006/07, it is intended to ensure that during consultations all researchers are advised on involvement, establishing links with patient groups, PPI Managers

and PALS in local Trusts. The RDSU will develop the course programme to provide training on participation techniques and an introduction to research for lay people wishing to get involved.

Health R&D North West

Health R&D North West, in conjunction with the North West Users Research Advisory Group, held a one-day regional conference on 'Sharing Successes: Public Involvement in Health and Medical Research' early in 2006. The idea for the conference grew out of a scoping exercise in 2005, which gathered 'success stories' about research activities involving the public, service users and carers that had taken, or were taking, place in the North West. People were invited to come and present their projects at the conference.

Around 80 delegates heard presentations by both lay and professional researchers. Networking and discussion took place in workshops. A wide range of research topics were covered, from oral health histories to nurse-led units to forensic mental health, all with an emphasis on the ways in which service users and carers had been involved and the contribution they had made to the success of the project.

Delegates reported that the range of projects and "finding out that things worked, gave a positive message" and were impressed by "level of user involvement in research in the region, and the enthusiasm and commitment Health R&D North West has for promoting user involvement".

The RDSU plans to build on its support for user involvement over several years and achieve a higher level of 'outreach' work in the region.

Sara Morris (Email: s.m.morris@lancaster.ac.uk) can be contacted for a free printed report of the scoping project and the conference. The report can also be downloaded from the Health R&D North West website (www.hrdn.org).

Peer review of own-account research: The PReviewNoW project

Launched in October 2002, PReviewNoW offers high quality, independent peer review for own-account research proposals for the NHS in the North West. Its reviewers, nominated for their research expertise, undertake regular training workshops to improve their skills and ensure that reviews include relevance to the needs of the NHS as well as scientific quality.

A scoping exercise was carried out last year to establish current practice and opinions regarding peer review of own-account research projects in the health research community.

A significant amount of own-account health research was revealed across the UK. Most organisations performed internal peer review, although student projects

and secondary research were often exempted. Commercial research raised widespread concern, particularly where the company sponsoring the research also performed the review.

Almost 50% of respondents supported wider introduction of a scheme similar to PReviewNoW. Only 12% had a negative response, with (39%) undecided.

Research managers highlighted at least three needs that were broadly supported by key stakeholder organisations:

- A continuing requirement for a peer review system for projects that are not scrutinised by an external funder.
- The need for greater consistency in local peer review, ideally through a national standards-setting body and a regionally-coordinated service.

- The need for training for both experienced and inexperienced peer reviewers.

Defects in research design are all too often identified at the publication stage. Surely this is a powerful argument for robust, independent and quality-assured peer review of all research at the development and protocol stages. This type of service will be integral to delivery of the new NHS Research Strategy³ and should be available to all NHS organisations sponsoring research.

Alison Robinson¹, Bob Lobley¹ and Philip Sloan^{1,2}

¹ Central Manchester and Manchester Children's University Healthcare NHS Trust

² University of Manchester

Coordinated research training for the North West

The North West is one of only two UK areas with the full range of topic specific networks (LRNs).

Health R&D North West, the RDSU for the North West of England, is a collaboration between the Universities of Lancaster, Liverpool and Salford. It covers Cheshire, Merseyside, Cumbria, Lancashire and Greater Manchester. HRDNoW has been discussing with LRN network leads how best to work together, particularly for joint education and training initiatives.

With 11 local sites of the networks, major changes to the way research is managed

and governed in the North West are imminent, so workstreams will be flexible and responsive to new training needs. HRDNoW recently published a training strategy with four workstreams:

- Working with networks and other organisations
- Training and education
- Support for the individual
- Public involvement

Trainers will work collaboratively to deliver research training, thereby reducing the chances of duplication and over-provision on some topics and gaps in other areas.

A draft report from the day has been prepared and sent to participants for comment and views on implementing the details within it. Developing a long term vision for co-ordinating research training will take time and HRDNoW will facilitate the process in order to try to meet the needs of researchers and the LRNs locally.

Ruth Hunter, R&D Manager, Health R&D North West

Research mentorship supports individuals and groups

Health R&D North West recently launched a new Research Training and Mentorship (TRAM) Scheme for the North West. The scheme is targeted at individuals and interdisciplinary groups (including service users) who already have some experience of research and who would benefit from sustained support and career development planning.

The aims of the scheme are to:

- Provide targeted support for individuals and groups to increase their capacity for undertaking high quality research relevant to local/national priorities;
- Increase the volume and quality of health and social care research in the North West;
- Increase research funding coming into the North West for research projects or fellowship support

Successful applicants will be allocated a mentor and offered tailored support and access to specialist training to help them develop, focus and carry out a small programme of research activity such as writing up a paper for publication or preparing a research proposal for external funding,

including the Research for Patient Benefit Programme. The scheme relies on a Personal Development Plan (PDP), which addresses the specific needs of the mentee. Throughout the period of the award, the duration of which will vary depending on the individual needs of the applicants, the PDP will serve as the basis for the work carried out. Health R&D NoW will fund and manage a Personal Learning (Development) Account (PLA) to support the PDP.

Award holders and mentors will liaise closely with the award holder's line manager not only to make sure that the research aims of the applicant are met, but also to ensure that these are compatible with local needs and priorities. In this way, the TRAM scheme is intended to provide benefits to the host organisations, applicants and service users. Tim Twelvetree, Health R&D, North West University of Salford

Further details of the TRAM Scheme can be found at:
www.hrdn.org
Email: HRDNoWTRAM@lancs.ac.uk

Student placements – advantages for all involved

Over the past three years the East of England RDSU has organised informal summer, and on-course placements for undergraduate and masters students with research active clinical groups in local trusts. The placements take considerable effort to organise but they benefit all concerned, sometimes to remarkable degree. At best this has enabled busy clinicians and researchers to form new collaborative activity, facilitated by focused time provided by a willing and able student for up to ten weeks over the summer months.

As an RDSU placed within a university, engaging actively with successful research groups in the NHS, the RDSU is in a unique situation. They understand the needs of the research groups and the capabilities of students.

Placements are hoc, where suitable placements and students can be matched, guaranteeing as far as possible

the best match between student and placement.

Students gain valuable experience during their degrees and activity has ranged from data collection and collation on established projects, literature reviews for new areas of activity, analysis of data, coding data, to engaging in audit activity.

Of the 18 placements to date, three students have been employed by clinical research groups beyond their placement and two of these students have gone on to register for PhDs with the research groups they were placed with. One student has been awarded a peer reviewed fellowship. There are currently eight ongoing projects, four published papers, three in preparation and numerous conference posters.

The most gratifying outcome has been funding. Commercial sponsors have been sufficiently interested to fund bursaries of

£1,500 or more. This source, which last summer amounted to £6,000, is becoming well established to the point where funders are willing to consider year-on-year funding. Research groups have sometimes provided bursaries of £500-£1000. Some students have worked part-time undertaking administration or summer reception cover for the research group. Others have found other part-time work to fit round the research activity.

Student placements have grown into a successful activity in a way that was not anticipated. If students continue to develop research careers, then an additional valuable resource will have been provided for the NHS.

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Best information > Best Research > Best Health Conference

Trent RDSU put on a one day conference for librarians and knowledge managers to discuss how they could support the new NHS R&D strategy in November 2006. David Copsey, Library and Information Services Manager, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust reported back from the day for the newsletter.

'An enthusiastic welcome awaited me from the Trent RDSU team – they thought I was a speaker. Their welcome was no less sincere once I told them I was a delegate.'

Nichola Seare, Head of Knowledge Management Research at East Midlands SHA outlined the new funding arrangements for patient-based research, which was very helpful .

Andrew Booth from the School of Health and Related Research at Sheffield University looked at meeting the challenge from a knowledge management (KM) perspective. Like Nichola, Andrew also recognised that the strong will get stronger. He had concerns about national understanding of KM.

A group work session asked "how does a researcher make the most of their library." We shared examples of what librarians are already doing. My experience is that there is great variation in the level of provision between different Trusts.

Donna Johnstone from RDInfo highlighted the organisation's role in research advice; funding information and training

directories. Screen dumps demonstrated the growing volume and the wide variety of worldwide organisations funding UK research. RDInfo deserves wider awareness. The website <http://www.rdinfo.org.uk> is really useful in pulling things together from a range of different sources. I sensed that many delegates were not aware of the richness of information accessible from this single site.

The day gave me the enthusiasm to improve the links between research and information to benefit patient care in my own Trust.'

david.copsey@nhs.net

South East RDSU Unit Launch

The SE RDSU was launched with a conference in May 2006, marking the joining of the three universities into one RDSU for in Kent, Surrey and Sussex.

There are at least two other RDSUs in England that operate across more than one university, so this is not new. But the conference was new and in some ways an experiment. Quite a successful one though, as about 100 people attended the day. A keynote speaker followed an afternoon of informal workshops and opportunities to network.

So what worked?

Of the six workshops, the most popular was 'Finding Funding for Research'. Second popular was 'Designing Questionnaires', showing that the standard tasks of an RDSU are still very much in demand.

People said they attended the launch because:

- I desperately want to get involved in research and grant writing
- To understand how a private company can work with the NHS to develop research
- To find out more about the RDSU
- To meet others involved in local research

The SE RDSU plans to run a conference again in 2008.



Where are RDSUs?

For an interactive map that shows where RDSUs are go to: www.national-rdsu.org.uk/Network/RDSUmap.asp

List of RDSUs:

Dorset RDSU
East of England RDSU
Gloucester RDSU
Health R&D NoW RDSU
Pan-Bath and Swindon RDSU
Pan-Bristol RDSU
Penninsula RDSU
Portsmouth SE Hampshire and Isle of Wight RDSU
Salisbury
Somerset
South East RDSU
Southampton RDSU
Thames Valley RDSU
Trent RDSU

RDSUs:

- Assist researchers to develop high quality studies
- Support clinical trial units and collaborate with research networks to increase research activity in health services
- Identify, train and nurture researchers to increase skills for research in healthcare, including research associates of the National Institute for Health
- Promote patient and public health and primary care research
- Assist healthcare organisations in developing research strategies and translating research into practice
- Organise events to support research capacity development in healthcare

This newsletter is edited by Bridget Carpenter of the South East Research and Development Support Unit. For further information on anything in the newsletter please contact:

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RDSU event alert

2007 Trent RDSU 'Networking for Research' conference
17th May 2007 Walkers Stadium in Leicester

The conference will look at whether research networks are effective in delivering high quality research in the NHS.

Professor Peter Selby, co-director, UK Clinical Research Network, will give the keynote address followed by a plenary session looking at specific research networks. In the afternoon, it is planned to hold a number of parallel sessions about the activities of the RDSU, incorporating examples of research facilitated by networks. The conference is aimed at people from any discipline with an active interest in health services research in Trent. Representatives from RDSUs across the country will be invited to attend.

For further information go to: www.trentrdsu.org.uk

2007 Trent Fellowship support event

Trent RDSU is proposing to host a meeting for fellows in the region in Spring 2007 to discuss the possibility of offering a programme of mutual support, information exchange and networking. If you are interested in finding out more about the event contact Karen Taylor, Trent RDSU, 0115 846 6907, Karen.taylor@nottingham.ac.uk www.trentrdsu.org.uk

2nd Annual RDSU National Conference

Building – Strengthening – Sustaining Research Across England

Thursday, June 14th 2007, Goodenough College, London

How can RDSUs more effectively bring together national research groups, examples of good practice, challenges and successes? This conference will offer an opportunity for RDSU staff and key stakeholders in research capacity development to present their work and network with colleagues on how RDSUs best support the National Strategy "Best Research for Best Health". Think national – act local.

For further information go to:

www.national-rdsu.org.uk or contact the conference organisers at rdsu@port.ac.uk or phone 023 9228 6236.

For details of all research events and training opportunities go to the RDLearning website: www.rdlearning.org.uk