

The UK medical research community has recognised a growing need to analyse and demonstrate the improvements in national health and prosperity that have been achieved by investment in medical research. Evaluation allows research funders to develop more effective R&D practices and so demonstrate accountability and good governance. Ultimately, developing better evidence through evaluation helps to build public dialogue and make the case for investment in high quality research that pays dividends for the nations health and wealth.

Recent years have seen significant activity in quantifying biomedical research inputs and outputs. However, despite some important examples of socio-economic analyses, less has been done to evaluate research outcomes and impact. Following initial scoping work by the Academy of Medical Sciences, the Academy has worked with the MRC to constitute a UK Evaluation Forum. The remit of this Forum is 'to explore how member organisations might share information and co-ordinate activity in evaluating and demonstrating the outcomes of research relevant to human health.'

Steering Committee

An Evaluation Forum Steering Committee was convened, representing a range of governmental, research council, charitable, academic and commercial research organisations. The Committee decided on a two-phased strategy, beginning with a mapping exercise on how member organisations carry out their own evaluations, what information has been generated and how this information has been used. This exercise would then be analysed to identify what lessons can be shared within the UK and abroad (including other research disciplines), to highlight where further research is required and to determine future opportunities in evaluation.

Working Group

Each member organisation nominated a representative to sit on the Evaluation Forum Working Group, to carry out the mapping exercise and analysis. Members approached evaluation from the perspective of research stakeholders, including the funders, users and beneficiaries of research, as well as the researchers themselves.

Members agreed that different types of stakeholders vary significantly in their interests, i.e. researchers are concerned with academic quality and profile, research funders focus on the effectiveness of different funding mechanisms, health care practitioners need information on the effectiveness of health strategies and Government wants to show the national impact of research policies over relatively short timescales. Significantly, it appears that these interests are not always clearly defined or understood within and between stakeholder groups.

From this, Forum members agreed to focus their activities on two issues:

- i. Developing a shared understanding of the 'state of the art' and best practice in methods/systems for evaluating research outcomes.
- ii. Laying the foundations for improving the impact of evidence about the benefits of research, i.e. better targeting and meeting the needs of research stakeholder groups.

Symposium

Members decided that the organisation of a symposium would be central to their activities, in order to:

- Bring together UK research stakeholders to discuss their evaluation needs and expectations.
- Help to build the interface between the needs of research stakeholders and what the biomedical research community can deliver, i.e. encourage communication on the nature and scale of the benefits that can reasonably be expected from the investment in research and enhance receptivity to the value of the research enterprise and its deliverables.
- Understand what has already been attempted in exploring the socio-economic impact of health research in the UK and internationally.
- Identify current and future possibilities (and limitations) of research outcome evaluation methods i.e. identify critical success factors and best practice in existing methodologies, clarify continuing challenges for proactive research assessment, share perspectives on gaps in current knowledge and encourage an integrated view across the whole research community where appropriate.

Outcome

The issues and lessons that emerge from the symposium will be incorporated into a widely disseminated report of the Evaluation Forum. Thus, Evaluation Forum activities, including the symposium, are expected to add value to the efforts of individual research funders and others by:

- Helping to identify, share and implement best practice in evaluation of research outputs and outcomes.
- Synthesising information from disparate sources to build the case for the value of research to UK health and wealth creation.

Steering Committee Membership

- Lord Turnberg FMedSci, Vice-President, Academy of Medical Sciences (Joint Chair)
- Professor Colin Blakemore FRS FMedSci, Chief Executive, Medical Research Council (Joint Chair)
- Professor Ian Diamond, Chief Executive, Economic and Social Research Council
- Ms Diana Garnham, Chief Executive, Association of Medical Research Charities
- Dr Russell Hamilton, Deputy Director of Research and Development, Department of Health
- Dr Michael Jubb, Director of Policy and Programmes, Arts and Humanities Research Board
- Dr David Lynn, Head of Strategic Planning and Policy Unit, Wellcome Trust
- Sir Keith O’Nions, Director General of Research Councils, Office of Science & Technology

Working Group Membership

- Professor Martin Roland CBE FMedSci, Director, National Primary Care Research & Development Centre, University of Manchester (Chair)
- Dr Liz Allen, Senior Policy Adviser, The Wellcome Trust
- Dr Jonathan Bickley, Research Policy Manager, Department of Health
- Dr Tony Peatfield, Head, Corporate Governance, Policy and International Corporate Affairs Group, Medical Research Council
- Dr Robin Fears, Senior Policy Advisor, Academy of Medical Sciences
- Dr Angela Galpine, Director Science Funding Administration, Cancer Research UK
- Mr David Humphry, Economics and Statistics Unit, DTI
- Mr Iain Jones, Head of Evaluation, Economic and Social Research Council
- Dr Steve Morgan, Associate Director Evaluation & Analytical Services
- Dr Clive Pritchard, Office of Health Economics
- Dr Mike Wallace, GlaxoSmithKline
- Dr Chris Watkins, Medical Research Council