



PHE Board Paper

Title of meeting	PHE Board
Date	Wednesday 27 January 2016
Sponsor	John Newton
Presenter	Bernie Hannigan
Title of paper	Update on Research

1. Purpose of the paper

- 1.1 The purpose of the paper is to provide an update on research and related activities, focussing on the implementation of the strategy for Research, Translation and Innovation. The commentary provided in this paper relates to:
- a) the published strategy for Research, Translation and Innovation received previously by Board members
 - b) a presentation on current actions and progress
 - c) a table of how PHE will evidence its progress (Annex 1)
 - d) PHE Board 'watchlist' from October 2013 (Annex 2)

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Board is asked to
- a) **NOTE** current research achievements, recognised externally and highly relevant to PHE remit
 - b) **NOTE** current engagement with the external health research landscape
 - c) **COMMENT** on the contents of this paper and the presentation
 - d) **COMMENT** on the questions highlighted at the end of the presentation

3. Background

- 3.1 PHE was established with resources, expertise and a track record of excellent research relevant to specific areas of its current remit. Amidst changes with the health research sector, including significant changes to the availability and allocation of research funding, assets have been retained and continue to enable high quality findings that are useable and used in the discharge of functions of PHE and public health services globally.
- 3.2 Current PHE research performance is highlighted in the annual review of PHE research 2014/15¹ and mentioned in the NIHR Annual Report 2014/15.
- 3.3 UK health research funding remains very healthy. Despite progressive rationalisation, the system remains complex particularly for public health themes that may straddle the NHS or be entirely outside it. We have a major advocacy role among sector funders, regulators and researchers to ensure that the existing infrastructures and initiatives facilitate public health research. And when opportunities are created, we support PHE colleagues and research partners to engage.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 The holistic approach advocated in our strategy 'Doing, supporting and using public health research: the PHE strategy for research, translation and innovation'² (RTI) sets out how our work can have an impact on public health. A significant challenge for PHE is to ensure that colleagues can access, use and share robust evidence for *all* parts of its remit and / or take action towards filling gaps in the evidence base.
- 4.2 In setting out its aspiration 'to support the transformation of public health practice and services', the strategy acknowledges the need to work in partnership across 'health and care, academia and the private sector'. Success will require clarity on the specific actions to be undertaken by PHE, who / what are the appropriate partners in specific circumstances and how to obtain the necessary resources. Important elements for action are summarized as follows:
- a) **Doing Research**
2016 and 2017 are critical years. Large public health research investments will soon end and others are in review. Research funders and policy-makers are considering how best to shape the future so we are participating with health and care partners, research councils, charities and lay people to optimise this for public health benefits. PHE colleagues are contributing at strategic, programme-specific and topic-specific levels.
 - b) **Supporting Research**
PHE staff encompass expertise, roles, networks and access to resources, including facilities that are complementary to those of universities or other research institutions. Engagement over time is changing the way the organisation is perceived, eg from being seen as a potential source of research funds to being a valuable research partner. We assist researchers to focus on questions relevant to public health; we enable access to resources such as data or samples (for appropriate projects) and help to steer projects towards outputs of most value to practice, or policy, in the sector. Our work on 'Translation' and 'Evaluation' aspires to establish frameworks based on best practice distilled from exemplars and advice globally.
 - c) **Using Research**
PHE is an evidence-led organisation so all staff must access and use the best available evidence. This greatly assists researchers to achieve the desired impact of their work. Our developing Knowledge Management Platform includes both sector-wide access to digital evidence bases, eg experiential evidence such as case studies as well as the published literature, as well as training / support to access, critique, synthesize and share knowledge. To ensure our own evidence products are of appropriate quality, our mandatory publication standard is being rolled out across PHE, accompanied by advice and training. All publications authored or commissioned by PHE staff, whether published ourselves or under external titles, will be curated for ease of access in our evolving institutional repository (part of the PHE Knowledge Management Platform).
- 4.3 The 'Measures of Success' defined in our strategy for each of five strategic priorities are the elements of impact and will be monitored across all PHE

directorates through a new Strategic Implementation Group (RTI-SIG). Annex 1 lists the measures, how we can evidence their achievement and developments that are in train to optimize the collation of robust information.

- 4.4 Across Whitehall departments, R&D expenditure is now treated as 'capital' as it is expected to deliver a return on investment (RoI). To retain their funding, departments may need to demonstrate their return on investment, depending on those who receive their funds to supply the required information.
- 4.5 The RTI-SIG will consider how well our research outputs are impacting on public health (locally, nationally and globally) and after 18-24 months should commission an external evaluation using methodologies to estimate RoI that have proved useful for other organisations. The remit of our proposed External Advisory Group will focus on achieving impact.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 PHE is building upon research strengths and developing research capacity across more of its remit. Its role in research is being defined and clarified with sector partners so that together we can articulate evidence gaps from experience or the literature, work with research policy-makers and funders to ensure resources, support academics to focus their attention on those evidence gaps, and ensure that staff in PHE and sector-wide have the expertise and resources to access and use the ensuing evidence.

Professor Bernie Hannigan

Deputy Director – Research, Translation & Innovation

January 2016

References

1. The 2014 / 2015 PHE Annual research review is accessible via the 'Research at PHE' link from our website or <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phe-research-annual-review>
2. Doing, supporting and using public health research', the PHE strategy for Research, Translation and Innovation is accessible via the 'Research at PHE' link from our website or <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/doing-supporting-and-using-public-health-research-phe-strategy>
3. National Institute for Health Research Annual report 2014/15
<http://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/about-NIHR/NIHR-Publications/NIHR-Annual-Reports/NIHR%20Annual%20Report%202014-2015.pdf>